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“ But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts ; and be ready always to give an answer to every man, that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.”—1 *Peter*, iii. 15.

“ But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes. And the servant of the Lord must not strive ; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves ; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.”—2 *Timothy*, ii. 23—25.

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PREFACE.

IT was not originally the intention of the Author of the following pages to have troubled the Reader with a preface, which will account for the introduction of some remarks in the *Conversations* which would with more propriety have been inserted in this place. The great importance of the subject, and the number of excellent works upon it already before the public, seem to make a few introductory observations necessary. To those well read in the best authors, the publication of any thing new, by one acquainted with them, and able to appreciate their worth, may afford matter of surprise; and the compiler of this very humble volume is not without some apprehension that the fact of its production may lead to the conclusion of incompetency to the task. It is, however, neither from a blind zeal, ignorant of the great number of writers, who have in fact exhausted the subject, and presented it under almost every variety of form of which it is capable, nor from the confidence generally connected with superficial

reading, that the present volume has originated. If old books could be got into general circulation among all classes as much as they deserve, there would be no occasion for new ones on sacred subjects; but so long as many are indifferent to religion, as well as some opposed to it, no effort on its behalf, when conducted by right means, can be regarded as unnecessary. The critic who will read the attempt here made to explain the nature of the Evidences of Christianity, before he passes judgment upon it, will find that its object is to recommend Christianity, as defended in the pages of its *best* advocates; to induce all into whose hands it may fall to investigate the claims of religion, before they venture to neglect its precepts, and to despise its warnings.

The form of Conversations, under which the subject is here presented, is not that which the author regards as the *best* which could be adopted, neither is the proof developed to that *extent* which it would bear; and in many other particulars connected with the subject, additions of greater or less importance might with propriety have been made, had the present work been intended as a complete and systematic view of all that could be adduced in behalf of Christianity. The object,

however, of the author was to be read by those who cannot or will not read the works of abler men. That form, therefore, was adopted which experience has shewn most likely to succeed, and the argument developed to that extent only which the limits of a small and elementary work permitted.

The references given to other writers in the course of the work, will shew it was by no means intended to *limit* the proof of the truth of the Christian Religion to the certainty of the facts and arguments here adduced ; and it is presumed that the advocates of the additional evidence, as derived from the *doctrines* of Christianity, which might have been brought forward, would not have wished it to appear in a mutilated or imperfect form. No argument, of course, could have been derived from the doctrines of Christianity, without first establishing the fact of their existence in the Holy Scriptures, which would necessarily have involved a variety of considerations not adapted to a work of this kind, would materially have increased its bulk and expense, and consequently lessened the chance of its utility. It is apprehended that few, if any, will be disposed to cavil at the assumed fact of the existence of those doc-

trines which are in any measure alluded to; but if this be not the case, it must be observed, that the great weight of the argument is independent of them, and that the author leaves it for the Scriptures, fairly interpreted, to decide; being fully convinced, that the more closely they are studied, the more incontrovertible will be found the evidences in their favour.

As the sentiments of many of the authors made use of in the course of this work materially differ from those of others also quoted, upon points not connected with the arguments in which they respectively appear, the candid reader will certainly not impute to the compiler any intention of advocating their opinions, beyond what is *expressly* stated. The difference of language, and a resolution of not making use of any translation unsanctioned by public opinion, alone prevented considerable quotations being given from the principal continental writers, which would have marked this yet more strongly.

In the quotations given, and the authors cited, no hope is entertained of meeting the wishes of *all* parties: if they are allowed *in general* to be good, it is all that can reasonably be expected. Had the limits of the work permitted, most gladly would

abundant specimens have been given from the works of all the most distinguished writers; but the thing was impossible: and, after the reduction of the work to about one third its original size, the compiler can only regret that the labours of Bentley, Clarke, Butler, Sherlock, Waterland, Pearce, Skelton, Dodwell, Baxter, Douglas, and many others, not quoted in this work, as well as some whose authorities are adduced, should be so little known, except to theological students. If it might be permitted in this place to call the reader's attention to one quotation more, in addition to those in the body of the work, it would be the following from a laic, than whom none was better qualified to decide upon the value of our English writers.

“ But our own language has, from the Reformation to the present time, been chiefly dignified and adorned by the works of our divines, who, considered as commentators, controvertists, or preachers, have undoubtedly left all other nations far behind them. No vulgar language can boast such treasures of theological knowledge, or such multitudes of authors at once learned, elegant, and pious. Other countries, and other communions, have authors perhaps equal in abilities and diligence to ours; but if we unite numbers with excellence, there is certainly no nation which must not allow us to be superior. Of morality, little is necessary to be said, because it is comprehended in practical divinity, and is perhaps better taught in

English sermons than in any other books ancient or modern. Nor shall I dwell on our excellence in metaphysical speculations, because he that has read the works of our divines will easily discover how far human subtilty has been able to penetrate."—IDLER, No. 91.

It was intended to have given a complete list of all the English, and the principal foreign authors who have discussed the subject; but on trial it was found far to exceed the limits which it appeared desirable to preserve in a work of this kind. It may also be doubted whether a catalogue of *all* the authors would be a useful appendage to an elementary work, chiefly designed for young persons. A well-arranged selection of the best would perhaps be desirable; but the difficulty of selection is such, that not many would be inclined to undertake it; whilst the importance of such a list requires its being entrusted only to those really competent to the task. By a *catalogue raisonné* the evil of indiscriminate recommendation might be avoided, in giving the reasons of preference; but the value of such a catalogue depends on the authority of the compiler; and the writer of these observations has no pretensions to that character, which would confer the power of balancing the comparative merits of men of the

highest attainments, or would enable others to confide in decisions so delivered. If the work now submitted to the public have any weight, the references given will be found sufficient, inasmuch as they will leave the unlearned and unskilful in the hands of far better guides, whose works will furnish abundant information as to the labours of others.

For the omission of a detailed statement of the writers against Christianity, no apology is deemed necessary ; the reason of it, however, was in the bad faith which has generally been manifested on that side, in its authors availing themselves of the labours of the advocates of Christianity, to patch up a reputation for learning and research ; at the same time that they have not scrupled to make use of gross misquotation, and the repetition of arguments and statements repeatedly disproved. The author had no wish to shorten the labours of the disseminator of infidelity of the present day, by presenting him with a catalogue of those publications which might aid his exertions. Real objections have by no means been concealed, and it is trusted they will not be found unfairly stated ; but being mere questions of argument, and not of fact, it mattered not from whom they originally pro-

ceeded. Those who read the authors in defence of the particular portions of the Evidences of Chrsitianity, will find the most full and explicit references to the works of objectors to such portions; and this is all that can be necessary.

As little reference as possible has been made to those now living who have preceded in the same course, from motives of delicacy, and the belief that their merits are sufficiently known to enable any one, really desirous of reading the best living authors, to refer to them without hesitation. It is painful to withhold the expression of admiration so justly their due; but the wish to prevent any misconstruction of such expression prevailed over every other consideration. So far as use has been made of their works, the author trusts the object for which they have been brought forward will be deemed a sufficient apology for connecting their acknowledged strength with what may prove the weakness of the present work, so far as it is original. In all cases, however, the reader is requested carefully to distinguish between the fault of the compiler and the matter compiled, that no responsibility be attached to others unjustly.

Still more earnestly is it requested, that those

who may regard the whole as unsatisfactory will not suffer their minds to be prejudiced, in consequence of its deficiencies, against the cause it advocates. A decision is not unfrequently right, when the reasons given are wrong; and it is very possible, after the great quantity of reading through which the writer thought it a duty to wade in the first instance, a correct impression, so far as the result is concerned, may remain on the mind, when the various means by which that result is obtained have in some measure weakened the force of each.

If, then, the summary now presented to his attention be deemed, after all, inconclusive, the reader is requested fairly to examine some good original treatise upon the point where he deems the present work defective or erroneous. If, on the contrary, this attempt (imperfect as it is) be found sufficient, let the reader, who is a stranger to the subject, judge what must be the weight of the evidence when presented by such men as Bentley and Butler.



CONVERSATIONS

ON THE

EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

2
et

CONVERSATION I.

BEATRICE.

My brother and myself have a favour to request of you, my dear sir, which we hope you will not deny us, though we have some hesitation in asking it.

MR. B.

The sooner I hear it the better. You may be sure that nothing short of necessity will occasion a refusal.

EDWARD.

Our hopes and fears alike arise from the nature of our petition. We are very desirous of learning from you, in conversation, the evidences for the Christian religion.

MR. B.

This is, indeed, more than I expected; and I might answer, that, like yourselves, I am influenced in two ways; the importance of the sub-

ject putting it out of my power to refuse, at the same time that it makes me hesitate in acceding to your wishes.

BEATRICE.

Thank you, sir, for the first part of your answer, which the second only teaches us to value more.

EDWARD.

We are, indeed, aware that it is no slight task we impose upon you, my dear sir ; but we have long been anxious upon the subject, on that account.

MR. B.

You have then considered the subject, in some measure, already ; but do you think you will more clearly understand it in consequence of conversations upon it ?

BEATRICE.

We hope so. In conversations, indeed, between ourselves, we have rather puzzled ourselves than otherwise, which perhaps was the necessary consequence of our attempting to argue upon a subject of which we know a little, and only a little.

MR. B.

Not improbable. But what is the sum of your present knowledge ?

BEATRICE.

My brother knows more than I do ; but he has

only a kind of general and vague idea arising from books, which he has looked at, rather than examined, and of which he has no distinct recollection, owing to his having given himself up of late so exclusively to other studies. For myself, I can say very little; indeed, I am almost ashamed to say, that I believe in the truth of the Christian religion because I feel I cannot do otherwise than believe—yet that is the fact.

MR. B.

Can you not, in some measure, ascertain the grounds of your faith?

BEATRICE.

Perhaps I might by hard thinking; but as I would much rather be able to “give to every one that asketh me a reason of the hope that is in me,”—an answer founded on rational principles—you would indeed render me an essential service by pointing out the particulars wherein the real strength of the arguments in favour of Christianity consist.

EDWARD.

And not less so to me; for I find the little knowledge of the subject I at present possess wholly insufficient to satisfy my mind in many points. We both feel inclined to think that Christianity *must be* true, but are perplexed by

the circumstance of its truth being yet disputed, and know not well how to reconcile our minds to the fact that many have rejected it. It is also very distressing when one accidentally meets with persons of a sceptical turn, to be forced to bear the sarcasms they throw out, or the ridicule which they cast upon religion, and feel that we have no right to reply, from ignorance of the subject.

BEATRICE.

And even in reading books we do not escape a painful sense of inferiority as well as indignation in meeting with passages that seem to strike at what we have been accustomed to reverence, but of which we cannot immediately see the falsity.

MR. B.

I believe many persons as well as myself could fully enter into your feelings ; and if I can, in any measure, enable you to build your faith upon a firm foundation, my labour will be abundantly repaid : but do you think you will derive greater advantage from conversations on the subject than by reading some good treatise ?

BEATRICE.

I shall feel more interested in conversations than in the continued arguments of a theological disquisition. I fear I have not sufficient strength

of mind to examine the truth of the assertions of a learned divine page by page. As Pope said to Atterbury, I always find the last author convince me.

EDWARD.

On the contrary, I feel myself generally so much inclined to spend too much time in balancing probabilities, making nice distinctions, and examining all conceivable objections, that in many cases I quite lose the thread of the discourse, and forget the real force of the principal argument.

MR. B.

It is well for you that you have found out these tendencies to error in your minds.

BEATRICE.

Most probably we should not, had we not conversed together on the subject, when we found we differed so widely in opinion on many points, that we were led the more closely to examine ourselves, and each readily detected the faults of the other.

EDWARD.

It is on this account also that we should prefer continuing the consideration of the subject in conversations. In many cases we have perplexed ourselves needlessly, I am convinced, by losing sight of the great object we ought to have had in view, viz. the simple truth: and by dipping

into many books I have only made the matter worse; for as fast as one difficulty was cleared, another started up, of which the author perhaps took no notice; and the habit of doubting I found much more easily acquired than discarded.

BEATRICE.

Do you not think, sir, that conversation has its advantages in enabling one to obtain much information not usually met with in books, or dispersed in so great a number as to be almost out of reach, as well as in securing the thorough examination of each portion of the subject?

MR. B.

It undoubtedly has; but perhaps its principal advantage will be found in its being the plan yourselves have suggested. My own knowledge of the subject has been acquired in a manner so very different, that I hardly know how far I shall be enabled to bring it before you in so clear and convincing a form as the importance of the subject demands. Much, however, depends upon yourselves; and as I shall take care to give you references to authors whose opinions are of far greater weight than mine, you must be careful not to attach any weakness to the argument as developed by me, till you have first examined the original works, and seen how far the apparent deficiency may be inherent in the nature of the

subject, or only the consequence of my inefficiency. I should by no means consider myself justified in proceeding in this undertaking if I thought you would depend solely on my statements, and did not search whether these things be so or not. I shall give you a fair statement to the best of my power, remembering well the danger incurred by those through whom an offence cometh; but as the subject is of so grave a nature, and so much depends upon it, I must entreat you well to watch over both yourselves and me, in which case I trust our conversations will prove a mutual benefit.

BEATRICE.

But you will not make our understanding the subject depend upon our reading the authors you refer to?

MR. B.

I hope to be able to give you a clear and correct idea of it, without your having occasion to refer to any work; but I can only give you an outline, which you must yourselves fill up at your leisure, and according to your own peculiar wants and difficulties.

EDWARD.

But if the arguments you adduce are in themselves satisfactory, where will be the need of further inquiry? If not, it appears to me hardly probable that the perusal of many volumes in

detail would strike more forcibly than their condensed force delivered at once.

MR. B.

In the course of the inquiry it will, however, be necessary to consider various objections : now many of these, though found to be flimsy and worthless when examined, are yet specious, and not easily overthrown in few words. There is no objection of consequence which has not been fully considered, and, in my opinion, satisfactorily answered ; but it is impossible for me, in many cases, to convey to your minds the force of the reasoning which has been employed in these answers,—and mere assertions are of no value. It is easy to produce the effect on the one side, but difficult on the other : not because truth is with the former, and not with the latter, but because truth has, in such cases, to be searched for diligently before it is apparent ; and, till that is done, we cannot altogether reject the pretensions of falsehood, dressed in the garb of truth. It is in cases like these that full conviction can only be produced by full investigation, and from my anxiety not to injure the cause, which I cannot but believe to be divine, that I earnestly press upon you the necessity of inquiring fully in every case where you see reason to doubt the accuracy of my statements, or the correctness of my conclusions.

BEATRICE.

It would be unjust both to you, sir, and to the cause you advocate, not to follow your directions in this respect: but I trust you will, however, allow us the utmost latitude of personal inquiry which time will permit.

EDWARD.

And you will permit us to state, not only the objections which really have weight in our own minds, but also those which we have heard, and which, though they do not so much affect us, we yet find it difficult to answer properly.

MR. B.

Certainly; but I would not have you waste your time in searching out difficulties, or in bringing objections which you are conscious do not deserve an answer. Inquire boldly and diligently as to what is the truth; but remember that the inquiry is of too much importance to permit trifling and sophistry.

EDWARD.

There is then an objection which is somewhat connected with the observations you just now made, which seems to deserve some consideration. From what you there stated, it would appear, that no full conviction of the truth of Christianity,

unmixed with doubt, can be obtained without diligent inquiry, proceeding from personal interest in the subject?

MR. B.

Certainly not, if you mean rational conviction.

EDWARD.

But if so, where is the right of censuring those, who, not feeling sufficient interest in the subject, have no motive for inquiry?

MR. B.

But why do they not feel sufficient interest in the subject? Can a rational creature be justified in regarding what assumes to be a revelation of the will of his Creator with indifference?

EDWARD.

But might not a Deist rationally think that the world would do very well without Christianity, without any revelation?

MR. B.

If you put this question with reference to the knowledge of God and of our moral duty, as existing at the present day, which we can deduce from first principles, and which is generally termed natural religion, your objection is unfairly stated; for the advocate for revelation argues, that the very knowledge which we now possess would, in

all probability, never have existed without revelation. You assume the point in dispute, if you take it for granted that all the religious knowledge which we are now enabled to found upon principles of strict reasoning, exclusively of revelation, has been discovered by the mere light of reason.

“The lights of reason and revelation fall upon our path in rays so blended, that we walk like the summer evening traveller, who, enjoying at the same time the full orb of the moon, and the sun’s solstitial twilight, is unable to ascertain the proportion in which he is indebted to each of these heavenly luminaries: and some of us, alas! are such incompetent philosophers, as, because the greater is below our horizon, to attribute all to the less.” — *NAPLETON’s Advice to a Student in Divinity.*

EDWARD.

But the advocate for revelation is no more at liberty to assume, that our present knowledge of God and of our duty arises from revelation, than the Deist to affirm, that reason alone is sufficient.

MR. B.

Certainly not.

EDWARD.

But if we may argue from analogy and the powers of the mind, as developed in other pursuits, may we not infer that reason is sufficient without revelation for our guidance?

MR. B.

If the discovery of our duty towards God and man, as founded in religion, were a matter of mere curiosity, perhaps I might partially admit the truth of your supposition; but it is a matter of infinitely too much importance for us to suppose, that the great Creator would leave it to be developed only in a long course of ages, by the slow advance of real knowledge and certain truth.

BEATRICE.

Admitting the possibility of human reason being sufficient to discover the truth, do you not see, brother, that, arguing from analogy, many ages would elapse, in all probability, before the principles of natural religion would be so established as to become binding upon the bulk of mankind?

MR. B.

But we need not argue only from analogy and the probabilities of the case: let us refer to facts, and you will find that the common sense of mankind is against you. Almost all nations have some notion of there having been a revelation or communication from the Creator to his creatures. Many have had their laws and civil polity founded in the idea of something of the kind; and the philosophers of old, who were sceptical as to the truth of the popular religions, agreed as to their

want of divine revelation to declare the will of God. Now subsequently to the establishment of Christianity this want of divine aid has no longer been felt, and there is therefore considerable probability that Christianity is a divine revelation from the very argument brought forward by the Deists, as to there now being no necessity for any revelation; nor can this be overthrown, except by shewing, not only that reason possibly might arrive at similar conclusions, as to natural religion and moral obligation, without the aid of revelation, but also that there is a strong probability that it actually did so, and that the results were imputed to revelation, for the sake of giving greater authority to them in the eyes of those who would be little disposed to acquiesce in conclusions, backed only by their intrinsic excellence and the authority of their fellow-men.

EDWARD.

There certainly would be a want of authority to establish the principles of natural religion, which revelation alone could supply. But is there that *prima facie* NECESSITY of inquiring into the truth of an alleged revelation which is generally supposed? May not a person leave the matter to be discussed by those who are so disposed, without troubling himself about it, provided he invariably obeys the dictates of conscience?

MR. B.

But how can he be said invariably to obey the dictates of conscience, who neglects to inform himself upon this subject? In order to establish your point, you should shew, that mankind are under no obligation to endeavour to obey the will of God; for if they are, they must be under a necessity of inquiring into that will; and if not, there is an end of all religion, whether revealed or natural. The advocate for revelation argues thus, and I do not see how his reasoning can be overthrown: that, from whatever sources our knowledge may have been obtained, it is certain there is a God, the Creator of all things, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, and consequently a moral governor: that, from the relation in which man is placed to him, and the course of providence, it is probable he may have made a revelation of his will; and therefore no one is at liberty to reject, without inquiry, that which professes to be a divine revelation, unless it involves such evident absurdity that inquiry becomes needless.

BEATRICE.

The Christian would also insist further, that there is not any such evident absurdity in the supposition that Christianity is of divine origin, and hence would infer, that no one could be justified in neglecting it.

MR. B.

And still less in rejecting it without examination, as some do.

EDWARD.

But many have not the means of instituting an investigation into its truth; and what are we to think when told, that "*he who believeth and is baptised shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned?*"

MR. B.

Do you not see how you are confounding things that are unconnected with each other? Belief necessarily implies a knowledge of the subject to be believed: in the case of ignorance, there is neither belief nor unbelief. Wilful ignorance you have before seen to be criminal: you must know that the doctrine of Christianity is, that we shall be judged according to our works,—the motives which influenced us, and the means put in our power.

EDWARD.

Yet still if full conviction cannot be obtained without inquiry, and the bulk of mankind cannot inquire, from the very nature of the subject, and yet the defenders of Christianity allege, that the most serious consequences will ensue in a future state to all who reject it; do not these circumstances, taken together, constitute an argument of considerable force against it? If full conviction

cannot be obtained without inquiry, and the bulk of mankind cannot so inquire, can we suppose God requires an impossibility? Must not the tenet be given up, or Christianity itself fall to the ground?

BEATRICE.

But if the tenet be given up, it ceases to be a matter of importance whether Christianity be true or not, and it becomes merely a matter of curiosity whether mankind have been imposed on or not.

MR. B.

But upon what authority do you assume that the peculiar nature of the evidences in favour of Christianity is of that kind, that it can only be examined so as to carry conviction to the minds of a few?

EDWARD.

It is generally regarded as the province of the learned: the bulk of mankind are altogether incapable of receiving and judging of the evidences of Christianity.

MR. B.

But with regard to all, can you not conceive the possibility of Christianity's possessing a certain degree of evidence sufficient to produce conviction?

EDWARD.

Yes; but that which is false may, upon a par-

tial view, and for a time, appear true. And how can the illiterate Christian be sure he has not “ followed cunningly devised fables ? ”

MR. B.

Out of the thousands that make use of the common rules of arithmetic, and well-known results of geometry, how many do you suppose ever investigated the truth of those rules, — how many are there able to investigate them ?

EDWARD.

Very few indeed. Almost every mechanic knows the forty-seventh proposition of the first book in Euclid, and confides in it implicitly in fact : but I suppose not one in a thousand of those who make use of it could prove it.

MR. B.

Yet the universal use made of it proves that the evidence for it is to their minds irresistible. What then is that evidence ? whence does it arise ?

EDWARD.

I should suppose from experience : they find it *always* true in practice, and therefore conclude it *must* be so in theory.

MR. B.

And may not the unlearned Christian find Christianity so invariably true in the excellency of its precepts and knowledge of human nature, as

to draw a similar conclusion? So far as his knowledge went, he *might* have every reason to believe it true (the Christian asserts that he *would*), and no reason to believe it false, and would therefore be bound in conscience to obey it.

BEATRICE.

This would, however, suppose belief founded on erroneous principles, with regard to many.

MR. B.

Not on erroneous principles, but what to others would be defective principles. But all moral obligation must depend on the situation in which we are placed, and the means put into our power. Now one distinguishing feature of the *evidences* of Christianity, as of its precepts, is, that whilst it includes the greatest, it descends to the least; nor is there any intermediate stage in which it leaves the mind unsatisfied; at least so the Christian asserts; nor can he be confuted without that very examination which it is his object to obtain.

EDWARD.

But nothing is easier than making assertions, and threatening awful consequences: all religions do the same. The evidences of all, to the votaries of each, appear irresistible; yet all cannot be right; all, except one, must be false, nay, perhaps even all are false; yet all profess to be divine revela-

tions, and, according to your argument, are entitled to examination.

BEATRICE.

But examination of all is impossible, in the nature of things.

MR. B.

It is so, nor is it necessary. You forget that I limited my assertion as to the necessity of inquiry to those cases "*where there was no such evident absurdity as to render inquiry needless.*"

BEATRICE.

This restriction is certainly reasonable, and will greatly shorten the inquiry.

EDWARD.

But is it not objected to all pretences to revelation, that if God had revealed his will to mankind, he would have put the matter out of all doubt—made it fully apparent to all nations and every age?

MR. B.

But what have we to do with suppositions? We have to inquire into what has been done, not to speculate on what might have been done. Nothing can be more absurd or unphilosophical than to form mere hypotheses of the manner in which it may please God to act towards mankind. Without revelation we are almost wholly in the dark: we know nothing of God but by his works and

providence; and the case of a revelation is one that we cannot measure by any known standard. We can only argue from analogy, and analogy certainly furnishes no grounds for believing that a revelation *must* be made in the manner you suppose. We know neither the subject, nor the extent, nor the manner in which it may please God to reveal his will to us. For any thing that we know to the contrary, the subject may be of such a nature as to render it expedient, if not absolutely necessary, that the revelation should be partial, and delivered in a manner very different from our expectations. What we have to do is, to examine into the probability of its truth, its consistency, and agreement with the little we do know of God, through the medium of his works and moral government.

EDWARD.

It is also objected that Christianity is founded upon Judaism; that one alleged revelation is thus made to supersede another, which is contrary to our notions of the perfection and unchangeableness of God.

MR. B.

But do those who thus object know the rules of the Divine Government? Do they see the whole of the intentions of their Creator at a glance? Are they certain that the idea of change in the dispensations of God implies imperfection?

May there not be an expediency, if not a necessity, that the infancy of society may require a different dispensation to that which is best adapted for a more advanced period, in the same manner that education in early life is preparatory to that of riper years? May not Judaism and Christianity be parts only of one great whole, of which perhaps the whole will never be known in this stage of existence? Recollect how many apparently contradictory phænomena in the natural world are yet ultimately dependent upon one and the same general law, which was only discovered after the lapse of many ages. If you would discover the truth, you must collect facts rather than opinions, and examine their bearings upon each other, instead of suffering your attention to be wearied by straining at objects beyond your reach.

BEATRICE.

I do not see much force in my brother's objections; but there is one which I have frequently heard, which appears to me deserving consideration. It is, that men are so differently formed, that they never can believe in the same manner: what is proof to one is not to another; that, after all, it is a matter of uncertainty, and that it cannot matter what we believe, provided we do the same.

MR. B.

But this also assumes too much: for, though a

sceptic may bewilder himself and all who attend to him by metaphysical arguments, there are certain things which our common nature irresistibly inclines us all to believe as true, which, whatever may be said to the contrary, influence us to act in a particular manner; and, after all, it is action which is the true criterion of belief. I would earnestly recommend to your perusal Dr. Beattie's "Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth, in Opposition to Sophistry and Scepticism;" a work which you will not read with the less interest because it was the production of the author of the Minstrel.

BEATRICE.

O no ! I could apply his own words to himself :

“ But hail, ye mighty masters of the lay,
Nature's true sons, the friends of man and truth !
Whose song, sublimely sweet, serenely gay,
Amused my childhood, and inform'd my youth.
O let your spirit still my bosom soothe,
Inspire my dreams, and my wild wanderings guide !
Your voice each rugged path of life can smooth,
For well I know, wherever ye reside,
There harmony, and peace, and innocence abide.”

MR. B.

As to the second part of your objection, that it cannot matter what we believe, provided our actions be the same; admitting that it were true, as respects our conduct towards each other and its consequences, a moment's reflection will shew

you that nothing can be more false with respect to the relation in which we stand to our Creator, unto whom all the motives of our conduct are known. Christianity also inseparably unites belief and practice together in such a manner as to render it impossible for a man to practise Christian precepts as such, without the belief in Christianity as a divine revelation.

EDWARD.

But if inquiry into the truth of Christianity be necessary from the importance of the subject, and the possibility that it might be a revelation of the will of God, inasmuch as there was no *prima facie* absurdity involved in the supposition; still it does not follow that it has greater claims to our attention than any other religion of which the same may be alleged; and if a person is required to spend his time in inquiries of this nature, I do not see why he might not sit down to study the evidences in favour of Mohammedism.

MR. B.

It will not, however, be difficult to establish the claims of Christianity to investigation, in preference to any other religion.

EDWARD.

In what manner?

MR. B.

The great object in this inquiry is the ascertaining of truth, not the mere arguing for victory.

EDWARD.

Certainly.

MR. B.

If you were sitting down to study astronomy, and wished from observation to ascertain the true system of the world, how would you proceed?

EDWARD.

By collecting all the phenomena which presented themselves to my attention, by arranging them with reference to their apparent importance and connexion with each other, and afterwards examining them in the most careful manner I could in detail, beginning with those which from their importance, or from the peculiar advantages I possessed of examining them, offered the greatest probability of my ascertaining the causes of what I saw.

MR. B.

Will you then pursue precisely a similar course with regard to the religious world? You will find in it phenomena equally interesting, and capable of leading you in like manner to their causes. What is the state of the world, as to religion, at this present time?

EDWARD.

There are a great number of religions, differing widely from each other, both as to their doctrines and as to the influence which they respectively possess. The classification of them would be a very perplexing affair: and then they are subdivided into an infinite number of sects and parties; so that it would be very difficult to ascertain even the mere matter-of-fact as to what was believed, and by whom it was believed.

MR. B.

Nevertheless, make the attempt. All nations either believe in the existence of one God or of more Gods than one.

EDWARD.

By this means I am enabled to put them under the heads of Theists and Polytheists, and may discard the latter from further consideration, from the evident absurdity of their tenets.

MR. B.

The Theists you may also range under four heads—of Jews, Mohammedans, Christians, and Deists. In what do they agree, and in what do they differ?

EDWARD.

They all acknowledge one God; and the three first allege that he has made a revelation of his will to mankind: but these again differ as to the

extent of the revelation, and the persons to whom it was communicated ; all three agreeing as to the divine legation of Moses, the two last also adding that of Christ, and the last that of Mahomet.

MR. B.

So much for the fact of belief ; now consider that of numbers.

EDWARD.

Here nearly all is left to the Christians and Mohammedans, the numbers of the other two being very small in comparison.

MR. B.

Lastly, take into account character and influence.

EDWARD.

Here nearly all is left to the Christians.

MR. B.

Then has not Christianity the *first* claims on your attention ? Again, if Christianity be founded in falsehood, Mohammedism at once falls to the ground with it, and, in the opinion of all except the Jews, Judaism also : so that the question ultimately reduces itself to Christianity, or no revealed religion ; as Paley has stated it in the beginning of his work on the Evidences. Further, Mohammedism cannot be from God, inasmuch as it professes to be of *universal* obligation, and yet commands observances which in the nature of

things cannot be *universally* observed. The religion said to have been promulgated by Moses and the other prophets previously to the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the nation, was designed for that nation only, and we cannot therefore immediately argue as to its truth or falsity. The Jews of modern time and the rest of the world differ, however, as to the true interpretation of the religious books of the former; and if the anti-Judaical interpretation be correct, modern Judaism is untenable, which is rendered almost a matter of certainty, by the fact that hitherto all their calculations and expectations have proved fallacious. Lastly, Christianity professes to be of universal obligation, and contains within it nothing repugnant to the possibility of the assertion. It has also stood the test of time, and has never yet been positively demonstrated to be false. It is held by the most enlightened nations in the world, and hence arises at least some degree of probability for its truth. Now, under all these circumstances, which are mere matters of fact acknowledged by foes as well as friends, the advocate for Christianity maintains its pre-eminent claims to a full investigation. Admitting, for argument's sake, the possibility that the Deistical creed is correct, according to their own sentiments as to the importance of truth, they must, out of their own mouths, be condemned of God for not inquiring into the

truth of a religion which at first appeared likely to be from Him.

BEATRICE.

This is to me perfectly convincing. I am only surprised at your arguing so long upon a point which I was not aware was disputed, as to the claims of Christianity to examination: and yet you have not brought forward the consequences in a future state, should the Christian statement prove true.

MR. B.

I have not, and for this reason,—a Christian may tell an unbeliever that his happiness or misery in a future state depends upon his conduct now, in reference to this religion: but the sceptic will be little moved by the mere assertion, unless other circumstances give it weight. He would probably reply, “All other religions, in substance, say the same. I cannot enter into an examination of the merits of each—it is impossible; and why should I prefer inquiring into one rather than another. Your arguments can only amount to probability, and other creeds may be supported by equal or stronger probabilities.”

BEATRICE.

To this, then, your argument answers, that there is in the first instance not only far greater probability of its being true than any other, but also strong probability considered merely in itself;

and that as no alleged revelation of which there is only a possibility of its being from God, can be safely rejected without examination, so no excuse can remain for a neglect of inquiry into this.

MR. B.

And now I scruple not to add what I before omitted, that the awful consequences of rejection ought to have the greatest weight with every reflecting mind. If there were little chance of Christianity's being true, I grant that the fear of those consequences should have little weight; for it is easy to raise any thing into importance by attaching to it the possibility of awful consequences: but when any real probability exists of any events taking place, as in this case, we know that the real importance of such an event to us is measured jointly by its probability and its consequences: now the consequences are infinite, in case Christianity be true; and therefore he is inexcusable who rejects Christianity without examination, or neglects its claims.

CONVERSATION II.

MR. B.

HAVING seen the necessity of an inquiry into the truth of the Christian religion, we are naturally led to ask by what means we can ascertain it.

EDWARD.

We are here under great disadvantages, in that so long a period has elapsed since its first promulgation.

MR. B.

But, in consequence, we have no reason to believe that any further discoveries relative to the subject will hereafter be made.

EDWARD.

From the disagreement of its partisans among themselves, we are also deprived of the benefit of immediately ascertaining what is Christianity, and on what foundation it rests.

BEATRICE.

Yet this secures the certainty that there is no collusion.

EDWARD.

And from the rejection of it by many eminent men, we have some reason to fear that all inquiry will prove fruitless.

MR. B.

Their exertions against it have, however, been of the greatest use in eliciting truth, which is the great object we have in view.—Let us now see whence we can obtain information on the subject, confining ourselves strictly to facts which all acknowledge. We have, then, the existence of three religions, a good deal connected with each other, but of which the advocates of each maintain that the followers of the other two are deceived. We have the records to which these parties respectively appeal as containing the sum of their religions, and for which they claim a divine origin. We have; lastly, an immense mass of controversial writing upon the subject, which the advocates of each party regard as decisive. But Mohammedism overthrows itself; and hardly the shadow of a proof remains in behalf of Judaism: so that our attention is only directed to the works of their advocates, so far as they may be likely to overthrow Christianity.

EDWARD.

We have also to consider the works of those who have rejected all revealed religion, as the modern Deists, and those who rejected Christianity at its first appearance among the Pagans.

MR. B.

At present I assume nothing, however, relative

to the first appearance of Christianity ; that is a matter for future consideration. Now the truth of the religion, independently of what internal evidence of a divine origin its sacred records may furnish, evidently depends upon the truth of those records, and that upon the writings of those who have defended them. These writings also must be considered in two classes. We either refer to them for arguments or for facts. With reference to the former, it is of no consequence when they were written, as truth is invariable; with reference to the latter, it is of the greatest consequence in some cases, and in all of considerable importance to determine their origin.

BEATRICE.

Will you give us a sketch of the history (if I may so call it) of the controversies which have taken place on the subject, and which have given birth to the writings which form the materials in question ?

MR. B.

You will find an admirable outline already traced by the hand of a master in the first volume of Bishop Van Mildert's Boyle Lectures, and in the notes to it abundant references to the best sources of information. An historical survey of this kind, however, implies some knowledge of the subject itself in the reader, as otherwise it is a mere recapitulation of disputes about names, to which no distinct

ideas are attached. You must, therefore, for the present content yourselves with references to the works which give an account of the various defenders and opponents of Christianity. The best of these is Leland's *View of the Deistical Writers*, which is very valuable, from giving a fair statement of their writings in detail, and a temperate reply to each, though rather tedious, from the nature of the subject.

BEATRICE.

The name of Deist only refers to modern writers against Christianity, I believe.

MR. B.

“ The name of Deists, as applied to those who are no friends to revealed religion, is said to have been first assumed about the middle of the sixteenth century, by some gentlemen in France and Italy, who were willing to cover their opposition to the Christian revelation by a more honourable name than that of Atheists. One of the first authors, as I can find, that makes express mention of them, is Viret, a divine of great evidence among the first reformers, who, in the epistle dedicatory prefixed to the second tome of his *Instruction Chrétienne*, which was published in 1563, speaks of some persons in that time who called themselves by a new name, that of Deists.” —
LELAND'S View, &c. Letter I.

Baruel's *Memoirs of Jacobinism* will give you sufficient information with respect to the French authors on the subject, and you will find a great deal of useful information in Nichol's *Literary*

Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century. Hartwell Horne's *Introduction to the Critical Study of the Scriptures*, and Orme's *Bibliotheca Biblica*, also give references to some of the more important works; and the *Bibliotheca Britannica* of Dr. Watt, under the articles of Scepticism, Infidelity, &c. &c. will direct you to many more.—To you, Edward, I may also recommend the *Bibliotheca Theologica Selecta* of Walchius, and the *Delectus Argumentorum et Syllabus Scriptorum*, &c. of Fabricius. It may be as well to mention here, that some very valuable articles, either directly upon some branch of the evidences, or intimately connected with them, have appeared in various reviews, particularly the *British Critic* and the *Quarterly Review*, which you will find well deserving of your attention, after you have acquired further knowledge of the subjects most agitated in controversy. The Boyle, Bampton, Warburtonian, and Hulsean Lectures, together with various essays for prizes given at the Universities and elsewhere, must not be forgotten; and, lastly, as the original *Encyclopédie* contains almost all that can be insinuated against Christianity, our English *Encyclopædias* in general are well worth consulting on its behalf, both for the intrinsic value of the articles, and the references they give to the authors from whose works they are compiled.

BEATRICE.

Must not a distinction be drawn between those

writers who establish facts, and those who merely argue from such facts.

MR. B.

Certainly; in the first case we have principally to do with the truth of the statements; in the second, with the soundness of the arguments.

EDWARD.

Does not the quantity of writing on the subject in some measure militate against it? If the evidences are sufficiently convincing, surely it could never be necessary to write so much; and the doubts and difficulties of its opponents must have some solid ground, or they would never be so often renewed.

MR. B.

Christianity is not answerable for the conduct of its advocates, further than it may be shewn to dictate it. You cannot infer the weakness of a cause from the imbecility of its defenders. But the advocates of Christianity you will find men of a very different class. The deep interest of the subject has been the primary cause of the great number of publications on it. As to your second objection, Dr. Gerard will answer it for me.

“There is no subject on which doubts and difficulties may not be started by ingenious and disputatious men; and therefore, from the number of their objections, and the length of the controversy

to which they give occasion, we cannot in any case conclude that the original evidence is weak, or even that it is not obvious and striking. Were we to presume that every principle is dubious against which specious objections may be contrived, we should be quickly led into universal scepticism. The two ways in which the ingenuity of speculative men has been most commonly employed, are dogmatical assertions of doubtful opinions, and subtle cavils against certain truths." — *GERARD'S Dissertations*, vol. ii. p. 4.

EDWARD.

I would not bring forward objections merely for the sake of shewing my own ingenuity in devising them; but, before I feel entirely satisfied as to the justice of your arguments against those who neglect to inquire into the truth of Christianity, and reject it without examination,—it appears to me necessary to shew that there is some reasonable prospect of their being able to come to a decision on the subject,—which I think is not the case: the dispute appears interminable. If there were any one treatise extant which Christians would agree in, as being that defence on which they were willing to rest the issue of the inquiry, there might be some hope of coming to a decision; but when the whole Christian world is at variance, not only as to what is Christianity, but also as to how it is to be defended, surely some allowance must be made for men who have other things to attend to, as well as theological inquiries.

MR. B.

There is no solid argument in your objection:

any one who is really anxious on the subject will soon obtain sufficient information both as to what Christianity is, and by whom and in what manner it has been defended, and will naturally turn to the examination of that kind of proof which has most weight with him in other subjects. Besides, the clergy furnish a constant resource.

EDWARD.

But if Christianity be of that great importance which is alleged, why has not the whole body of proof been collected and arranged in such a manner as to enable every one at once to see all that can be said in its favour? I know, indeed, that there are collections professing to be demonstrations of the truth of the Christian religion; but there is none, so far as I have ever heard, which all agree in holding forth as such. Christianity is either capable of demonstration, or it is not: if the latter, I do not see how it can be defended at all, unless the threatening declarations of the New Testament are explained away; but if the former, why have we not such a proof as the *Mécanique Céleste* is of the Newtonian system of the world?

MR. B.

Because the nature of the subject hardly will admit of such a proof, and because if it did it would be useless. Absolute mathematical demonstration cannot be obtained. All that is neces-

sary to be obtained in proof of Christianity, is such a degree of probability as ought to induce men to act agreeably to it. For if it can be shewn that men act in other cases upon less proof than this question affords, their own conduct sufficiently proves the truth of the assertion of our Lord, "That this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world; but that men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil." You refer to the *Mécanique Céleste*, as being an example of a perfect proof of the theory of universal gravitation; suppose a person in common life was desirous of knowing all "that could be said in favour" of that theory, how far would the *Mécanique Céleste* afford him assistance?

EDWARD.

He would hardly understand a page of it.

MR. B.

Then where is the utility of your complete demonstration for common use? The very first paragraph of the work alluded to altogether overthrows any argument you can raise from the existence of the work itself, both as respects absolute demonstration and practical utility. If the observations on which astronomy is founded, and which demand the greatest degree of attention, as well as perfection of instrument, be incorrect; or that refined analysis, which it requires the utmost

exertion of the mind to follow, be in any instance falsely applied, all falls to the ground. Need I remind you of the necessity there is for applying to the whole of the results obtained, in the most careful manner, the theory of chances, for the calculation of the probability of errors ?

EDWARD.

But the proof of Christianity is not of so complicated a nature ; if it were, it would itself be an objection ; for it would be impossible that the bulk of mankind could understand it.

MR. B.

The full proof of Christianity, if systematically detailed, would be quite as complicated, and altogether removed above the reach of ordinary men : but a proof sufficient to convince every rational man is within the reach of all.

BEATRICE.

In what manner ?

MR. B.

A proof such as your brother demanded must ultimately depend upon the books of the Old and New Testaments, in their original languages : the origin of those books would therefore have to be ascertained, which would involve the question, also, of the authenticity and credibility of all those authors on whom we depended for informa-

tion on the subject ; and these again dependent upon others ; and then would come the calculation of chances of error. Judge from this one portion of what would be requisite, what the whole would be. On the other hand, such a proof as ought to convince a rational inquirer, may be soon made out ; there are abundance already in circulation. Thus, when I say Christianity is the religion founded by Jesus Christ, as contained in the New Testament, which is a collection of writings of his first followers, and proves from facts which cannot be denied, and reasoning which cannot be overthrown, that the religion itself is from God ; which is further established by the Scriptures of the Old Testament, by the internal evidence of the excellency of the religion, and by the history of the world,—I sum up the proof of Christianity ; and if any one deny or doubt the truth of any of these assertions, I have a right to refer him to those authors whose works in detail fully prove these points. I may, to shorten his labour, give an analysis of the process used to establish each of these particulars ; but it can no more be expected that I should give all the detail, than that Laplace should have first established the truth of every proposition in pure mathematics of which he makes use.

EDWARD.

But Laplace quotes them because they are indisputable : now the proofs of the particular pro-

positions on which the truth of Christianity depends are not so.

MR. B.

Have they been disproved?

EDWARD.

Not that I know of: but many eminent men have rejected Christianity, and have written against it.

MR. B.

You may rely upon it, that had any actual demonstration been made out against Christianity, you would not have been ignorant of the fact; its enemies have been too active to let any thing of that kind be passed over. Now consider for a moment the extent of proof on behalf of Christianity, and from how many quarters it has been open to exposure, if false. In its statements of historical facts, in criticism, in morality, in physical truth. If it could have been *positively proved*, for example, that such a person as our Lord Jesus Christ never existed, or that the New Testament was a forgery, or that it was contrary to sound morality, or that it contained statements contrary to what we know to be the real state of the earth, or commanded observances impossible, in the nature of things, to be observed by all men, at the same time that it professed to be of universal obligation; in any of these cases, the question would

have been set at rest for ever. You have also just asserted, that many *eminent* men have written against it: now if they could thus have *proved* Christianity to be false, would they not have done it?

BEATRICE.

Certainly; for by their writing against it, they shewed their wish to prove it false.

MR. B.

Yes; and by their not writing against it in those particulars where their peculiar knowledge best enabled them to detect falsehood, they have given us the strongest proof that there it was invulnerable.

BEATRICE.

So that the very fact you adduce is against you.

MR. B.

But there are other eminent men besides the Deists; and what do you say to the testimony which they give on the points where they were best able to determine the truth or falsity of these propositions? Why, those very men whose names stand the highest in each department are defenders of Christianity, and that because they knew, in what they were most immediately concerned with, the proof was decisive. Now, take these two facts together, and you will see there is

sufficient ground for belief that the professed proofs are real proofs. But if any one is disposed to doubt further, let him examine; the whole is open to examination; but not condemn others for looking upon such points as proved, which those most inimical to Christianity, and peculiarly fitted to examine, have not disproved, as well as resting satisfied with the researches of its friends, who believed in consequence of those researches, and whose testimony in any other case would have been believed in such subjects as they were most conversant with.

EDWARD.

This, however, is placing the belief of many upon a lower ground than that of others.

MR. B.

It is, and in the nature of things it must be so. Men are placed in such an infinite variety of situations, that the great Creator of all can alone be the judge as to where guilt attaches, and where it does not. All that I contend for is, that no sufficient reason can be adduced on behalf of actual infidelity, scepticism, or latitudinarianism, to militate against the language of the New Testament. The Judge of all the earth shall surely do right; and every circumstance of birth, education, and situation in life, will have its due weight with him: but the result of much reading and reflec-

tion on the subject has led me to a conclusion which you may at present think harsh,—that the real cause of infidelity lies in the heart more than in the head; in the will more than in the circumstances of the individual

CONVERSATION III.

EDWARD.

I FEAR I have wearied both you, sir, and my sister by my former objections; but my anxiety to have my mind at rest upon all preliminary points previously to entering upon the actual examination of the evidences themselves, induced me to press the doubts I have already expressed; and for the same reason, I should wish to consider one more and very serious objection, which appears to me to lie at the threshold of all further investigation, viz. that the whole proof of Christianity depends upon the veracity of those interested in its defence.

BEATRICE.

Not all, brother.

EDWARD.

Yes, all, directly or indirectly. It is from Christians that we have our accounts of the origin and history of Christianity. It is from them we have received the Scriptures which contain its precepts; from their hands, also, have we received the works of those who rejected this religion, and which may have been garbled to serve its cause. If even their own statement be correct, for fifteen hundred years every thing has

been in their own power. Its defenders, in later ages, have been evidently interested in supporting it: of those who lived at an earlier period we know nothing but through the accounts of their successors. These defenders also have been the priests of this religion, and had therefore a further interest in maintaining it. How, then, can we rely upon any proof derived from such sources?

BEATRICE.

This is, indeed, a strong charge; can you overthrow it, sir?

MR. B.

As far as is necessary. I must, however, take it for granted that you are acquainted with what is generally believed to be the true history of Europe during the period you have alluded to. I must also beg you to give some attention to the present state of the Christian world.

EDWARD.

It is divided into a great number of sects, all at variance with each other.

MR. B.

You will not dispute, I suppose, the truth of those facts which are acknowledged by persons of all parties, infidels as well as Christians.

EDWARD.

Certainly not.

MR. B.

And, I suppose, you will acknowledge that the

works generally received in the world as the productions of the persons whose names they bear, for the last three centuries at least, were really such.

EDWARD.

Undoubtedly; the invention of printing sets the matter at rest.

MR. B.

Then it is certain that never were nations more opposed to each other than many of the Christian sects have been. Could there have been any system of deception in common among those who persecuted each other to death?

EDWARD.

I should think not.

MR. B.

If there had been any system of deception kept up among the priests, would it have been concealed, notwithstanding all the martyrdoms that took place?

EDWARD.

No; those who were put to death by Christians would never have died in the faith of Christ had they not believed the religion of Christ to have been from Heaven.

MR. B.

The whole of the documents, then, on which we rely could not have been forged subsequently to

the Reformation. Now, of what character were the ages which preceded it ?

EDWARD.

They are generally called the dark ages, from the deplorable state of ignorance in which the great mass of the people were.

MR. B.

From the best sources of information relative to that period, what was the character of the clergy ?

EDWARD.

Very low indeed, both as to morals and as to intellectual attainments.

MR. B.

If then the documents of the period which preceded it were forged at that time, we should be compelled to believe that thousands of manuscripts were written with the most consummate art, and dispersed with the greatest care, by men utterly unqualified for the task, and some of them containing sentiments most contradictory to the course of life they were pursuing ; documents which when known must occasion the downfall of their own pretensions.

EDWARD.

That is wholly incredible.

MR. B.

If then the manuscripts of the fathers and the classics were really written by the persons whose names they bear, and at the times and in the places alleged (with the MSS. of the New Testament I do not concern myself at present), how far is it probable such were corrupted by those Christians of the middle ages through whose hands they passed?

EDWARD.

We know that the manuscripts of the classics were found neglected in the libraries of monks, who knew not the value of what they possessed. Those of the fathers were transcribed, and held of the greatest authority all over Europe. Any interpolation of the works of the former would never have been an object—any interpolation of those of the latter impracticable.

MR. B.

When these works were first edited, was it with reference to the interests of Christianity?

EDWARD.

No: some of the revivors of literature were even suspected of infidelity; and those who edited the Fathers never thought of making use of them to defend Christianity itself.

MR. B.

Then where does the slightest probability exist

that the documents on which we depend for the defence of Christianity are otherwise than what they profess to be—genuine productions of the persons whose names they bear, written at the times and places alleged, and handed down in substance the same as originally written? For a more particular account, of course, I must refer you to the successive editors of each, who have laboured to send out the works of each author as free from defect as possible.

EDWARD.

But admitting that all the works to which it may be necessary to refer, in proof of the truth of Christianity, be genuine and unadulterated, it by no means follows that they are true. In some cases, at least, very little weight can be attached to the declarations of the fathers; for I believe it is generally acknowledged, that they were both credulous, and addicted to exaggeration.

MR. B.

Perhaps so, and we must therefore be careful not to estimate their statements beyond their intrinsic value.

EDWARD.

But in some particulars we are almost certain they have recorded what they knew to be false: and is the testimony of such persons worth any thing? Does not their conduct throw strong suspicion on the religion itself?

MR. B.

One of the most violent of those who have impeached their authority speaks thus :—

“ The history of the Gospel I hope may be true, though the history of the church be fabulous. And if the ecclesiastic historians have recorded many silly fictions under the name of miracles, as they undoubtedly have, the blame must be charged to the writers, not to their religion.—*MIDDLETON'S Works*, vol. i. p. 131. 4to. ed.

The use which I shall make of their works will be such as cannot be materially affected by your objection.

BEATRICE.

Where they speak of things as passing under the public eye, or as being acknowledged by their enemies, or challenge investigation in cases where it could easily have been made, and would have decided the question, some degree of credit must be allowed them. It is not to be imagined that they would give their enemies so easy a triumph over them as to render themselves liable to certain exposure, by greatly departing from the truth in such points.

EDWARD.

In cases where their statements are corroborated by the acknowledgment of their enemies, or by the fact of no contrary statement having been published, which might reasonably have been expected, there appears no sufficient ground for

withholding the assent we should give to any indifferent matter of well-authenticated history. There must, however, be some cases in which we shall be reduced to their testimony alone, and that perhaps in points of great importance.

MR. B.

We must therefore the more carefully examine into the real probability or improbability of the truth of such portions.

BEATRICE.

But the evidence thus scattered through a variety of authors in different languages is completely inaccessible to ordinary readers.

MR. B.

It has been collected, arranged, and translated, for their benefit, by the defenders of Christianity in later times.

BEATRICE.

But how can we place reliance upon works of this nature, made by any man who has a personal interest in maintaining one side of a disputed point?

MR. B.

Surely ordinary readers may place reliance upon the accuracy of his translations, when, after a considerable lapse of time, his most acute and learned adversaries have never called their fidelity in question. Gibbon was no friend to Christianity, yet

he placed the greatest reliance upon the labours of "the indefatigable Tillemont," and "the laborious Lardner." It also so happens, that those who have laboured most in works of this kind could gain or lose very little, whatever might be the result.

BEATRICE.

Be that as it may, still it is reasonable to conclude, that personal interest does bias many of the defenders of Christianity, and prejudice many others of those who may be so circumstanced as not to have much to gain or lose. If men fancy Christianity to be a great public good in the first instance, it is hardly likely that their inquiries into its truth will be perfectly fair.

MR. B.

So far as the presenting a faithful statement of all that is known on the subject is concerned, such collectors of ancient testimonies have long been open to detection by their adversaries; but these having brought no counter-statements, the unlearned have a right to conclude the former are correct. As to opinions formed upon such collections, they must, of course, be tried by their intrinsic worth, and the degree to which they are borne out by the authorities adduced. In the fact of the matter being equally open to all parties, consists the real ground of confidence.

EDWARD.

But considerable allowances, I think, ought to be made for the partiality which it is natural a man should feel for any line of argument which he may have struck out. I can hardly imagine any one so entirely destitute of personal feeling as to examine a matter of deep interest, when his view of it appears nearly established, with the same equal mind with which he commenced his inquiries.

MR. B.

But others do not feel this predilection; many perhaps are opposed to it. There is a tendency, no doubt, in the minds of some to distort facts so as to further an hypothesis; but since this exists on the one side as well as the other, we are pretty certain that neither will allow the other to continue the publication of false statements, uncontradicted.

EDWARD.

But readers are prejudiced as well as writers. Those who wish to find Christianity true are not likely to examine statements in its favour with that degree of severity which the subject requires.

MR. B.

That some do not is certain; but knowing your liability to err in this respect, you can the more diligently guard against it.

EDWARD.

But if the generality of readers do not, one very material point is gained against Christianity, viz. the alleged general superiority of the Christian advocates over their antagonists is accounted for, and no argument can be drawn from the fact of the prevalence of the religion, and its successful resistance of all the attacks that have been made upon it. All argument founded upon the conduct also of the defenders of Christianity must depend upon the probability that they were neither deceivers nor deceived; but surely this probability is much diminished by the causes just mentioned; and how then can it be inferred that Christianity must be true, because it has been advocated by wise and good and learned men?

MR. B.

It cannot be inferred that it *must* be true; but that it *probably may be true* is not an unfair conclusion. The possibility that such men have been deceived must certainly be allowed; but from this we can only infer that their example alone is not a sufficient reason for embracing this religion, and that their reasons for so acting ought to be examined rather than implicitly received.

EDWARD.

But in addition to prejudice in favour of Christianity, the clergy (on whom the task of de-

fending it is naturally devolved) must have been interested as well as prejudiced advocates.

MR. B.

Are you sure that you can establish that point ?

EDWARD.

Many of the most eminent obtained high preferment.

MR. B.

But was it in *consequence* of their labours in this cause ? Was preferment a *probable* consequence ? I mean so far as to induce the clerical advocates to defend it ?

EDWARD.

I cannot say decidedly ; but it appears to me no very improbable supposition.

MR. B.

A more correct knowledge of church history would have taught you to form a very different conclusion. But whom do you regard as the more eminent clerical defenders of Christianity ?

EDWARD.

My knowledge of the subject is only very light ; but the names which more immediately occur to me are those of Sherlock, Butler, Warburton, Watson, Porteus, Lesley, Leland, Bentley, Clarke, and Paley.

MR. B.

In general, what should you think of the intellectual powers of these men ?

EDWARD.

Very highly.

MR. B.

You would not then think them liable to be deceived, where they gave sufficient attention to the subject ?

EDWARD.

Not unless their wishes to find some opinion correct biassed them.

MR. B.

And you will allow that to this subject they did give sufficient attention ?

EDWARD.

Certainly : their superior advantages arising from their intimacy with it is one of the things which I think goes far to account for their superiority over their antagonists. What chance could such a man as Paine have with Watson, even supposing the former had been right ? But the fact of their superior advantages does not exclude the probability of their being prejudiced and biassed by their wishing to prove Christianity true.

MR. B.

As to their wishes in early life, we know nothing ;

and it is too much to take it for granted, that they only inquired into the truth of Christianity after they had pledged themselves to support it. But, passing over that, do you think they were originally strongly biassed in favour of the established creed or not?

EDWARD.

Not perhaps strongly, but still in such a measure that they would be contented with less proof than would have satisfied men of their acuteness in other subjects.

MR. B.

What then is your idea of the nature of the evidences of Christianity? Is its proof so strong as to put the matter out of all doubt; or merely such as to persuade, in conjunction with prejudice and interest? I presume you would not assert, that these celebrated men were conscious they were defending a bad cause?

EDWARD.

Certainly not; but the second position appears to me so far probable, as to deserve serious consideration: if the first were admitted, of course the whole ground of controversy would be given up.

MR. B.

Nevertheless, as the first affords the most natural, full, and sufficient reason for the conduct of those whom you allow to have been very superior

men, even after all the deductions that can reasonably be made, the fact that such men have been the defenders of Christianity must afford some degree of probability of its truth ; but admitting the second to be more correct, how comes it that there has been *no honest man* found among all the numerous and learned Christians, of all classes, who have undertaken the defence of that religion, to avow the truth ? You acknowledge the ability, the acuteness, the learning of those you have mentioned ; and the list might, without much labour, be greatly extended. Now how does it happen (if there was any weakness or defect in the evidences), that they should have *all* professed the same conviction, have *all* pushed the matter into notice, and courted a discussion which they knew would prove fatal ? We have instances of men changing one modification of Christianity for another ; relinquishing preferment, and exposing themselves to persecution, for conscience sake. But where are those men of sound mind who, after a full investigation, have renounced the religion itself altogether ? Do you think you could bring forward any twelve men, of competent talents and learning, who are known to have been free from all bias against Christianity, and who can be proved to have *fully examined into its claims, who yet rejected it* ? You think much of the power of prejudice ; but I will remind you of a set of advocates for Christianity

who have been accused of a spirit very opposite to prejudice, and equally powerful—a love of innovation and change; advocates indeed, who have not left formal written treatises, but whose works will be remembered whilst the world lasts. Were the reformers, whose blood was poured out like water, men of light minds, prejudiced and interested? When they burst from the yoke of Rome, would they have retained that of Christ, had they doubted the verity of his religion? Would it not have been as easy to die for Deism as for Christianity? Were the rack and the stake likely to endear the profession of that name? No, no! When Luther stood in the Diet of Worms, with the fate of Huss before his eyes, and said, “Thus I believe; I cannot do otherwise—God help me!” his faith was not weak nor ill grounded: when Ridley and Latimer expired in the flames, they had not lightly discriminated between the religion of Christ and that which condemned them to death. They knew there was a reality in Christianity: they feared not man, who was able to kill the body, but God, who, after death, could destroy both body and soul in hell. Of the names you mentioned, some were men of remarkably independent mind; of a cast of character that scorned subjection to the dictates of any man, or set of men; who injured their own interests in life, in consequence of their freedom in speaking and acting. Is it probable that such men would have

suffered their minds to be blinded in that with which they were most conversant? You just mentioned Leslie as one of the most eminent of the clerical defenders of Christianity. You perhaps were not aware, that, prior to the abdication of James II., he had made himself obnoxious to that monarch, from his steady opposition to the Papists, and afterwards became equally so to his successors, from his conscientious adherence to the exiled king; and in consequence was reduced to great distress, towards the conclusion of his life. Would you not think him, then, worthy of belief, when you find him writing thus, with what he believed would be “the last effort of his pen?”

“If, in writing so much, and on so many subjects, mistakes have crept in, I hope they are not of importance; and, such as they are, could I examine and discover, I should readily retract them, and disown nothing but artifice and malice, from which my own conscience acquits me, and God, I hope, who is greater, will not condemn me. I have always thought it my duty to follow truth as closely as I could, without straying after worldly interest; and though the providence of God, infinitely wise and righteous, hath, for a great part of my life, excluded me from the public exercise of that sacred office to which I was called, yet I have the comfort of having endeavoured in some degree to serve, against its various adversaries, the cause of God, of religion, and of that church in which I was baptised, educated, and received into holy orders.—And being now in a point of time to which eternity is near, you will believe me if I declare (and to the world I would declare it), that in

this communion I resolve to die, and expect to be saved, by the merits and mediation of Christ Jesus."—*LESLIE'S Theol. Works*, folio. Pref. Ep.

EDWARD.

Still allowance must be made for habits of thinking too favourable to the side they espoused—professional predilections.

MR. B.

A little more close examination will shew you that even the very habits of life of several of the most eminent of these men were unfavourable to your argument. What tendency had the mathematical pursuits of Watson and Paley to soften the severity of their judgment with regard to Christianity? What tendency was there in the pursuits of Clarke and Butler to this end? Was "slashing Bentley," think you, a man likely to be deceived in his critical investigations, or cowed into silence as to their results?

EDWARD.

But their reputation and literary character might become involved in the defence.

MR. B.

How then came their reputation to be so involved? Was any necessity laid upon them to connect it with a weak argument? Were they likely men to do so? Had they felt the weakness of the cause, would they have dared to court a full

investigation of it? Had Bentley and Warburton no enemies? Were there none living who would have rejoiced to triumph over them? Why did they trouble themselves about the controversy, unless they believed it to be so important, that, at all events, investigation ought to take place, and the truth made manifest—unless they also regarded their own side so safe, that they feared no consequences—and their own conviction of the truth of Christianity was so strong, that they were willing to risk their own credit upon it?

EDWARD.

That their own reputation was dear to them, cannot be questioned; and it is no harsh inference to conclude, that they would not lightly risk it for a doubtful cause; but some allowance must be made for expectations of preferment in case of success.

MR. B.

To establish that, you must first shew that they were so keenly on the watch for preferment, and that there was a hope of it, arising from the line of conduct which they pursued, sufficient to have induced them to pursue it, which I am persuaded you are unable to do. But even were this the case, would it follow that there were no other, no shorter roads to preferment—or that none but this was adapted to the temper of their minds? If they

felt the cause weak, could they imagine that those above them, (who must have known it also,) would thank them for forcing it into notice — or that they should serve their own interests more effectually by turning aside from those paths of science and general literature for which nature appeared to have intended them, and in which they were fully conscious of their own power? Again, have you a right to assume such a want of upright principle in so numerous a body as the defenders of Christianity have now become? Can you for a moment imagine, that such an uncertain hope would prevail against reason and principle; that men of talents, of learning, and of acknowledged integrity, in other points, would suffer their minds to be so biassed by an uncertain hope of this kind; that they would run the risk of exposure, nay even court it, when the other means of rising into distinction were before them? Common sense tells us that such men would not so act; that no wise or able man would risk his character *unnecessarily* for that which he barely believed. We must therefore conclude, that the labours of such men would not have been undertaken without a full and overpowering conviction of the truth of Christianity, and did not arise from a belief so feeble as to require the aid of church emoluments to strengthen it. — This subject has occupied a considerable portion of our time; but as I wish you to examine the ori-

ginal works, rather than to rely on the arguments I may select from them, it is of great importance that you do not suffer the conviction which I am confident those works will produce, to be weakened by unfounded assertions, as to interest and prejudice in the authors; assertions easily made, but forming a miserable reply to the works in question.

EDWARD.

Is it not, however, to be regretted, that, in controversies on this subject, the defenders of Christianity had one very material advantage over their opponents, in that it was their principal study?

MR. B.

But is this advantage unfair? Can it, or ought it, to be objected to? With whom does the fault rest, if the parties are unequally matched in point of intellectual strength and acquirements? Whence are the defenders of Christianity to arise, if not from those who give up their lives to its service? What would be the result if the professors of arts and sciences, in general, were suspected in their statements, merely because they were professors? Am I to reject the experiments of Newton, and refuse to look at his Principia, because he was Lucasian Professor of Mathematics at Cambridge? Am I to question the accuracy of Porson, because he was Greek Professor? I cannot pretend to make the experiments in the one case, or to consult the manuscripts in the other; and I might be

told, that each of these great men was interested and prejudiced; yet who would not laugh at me, were I therefore to resolve I would pay no regard to either? We cannot believe that the love of emolument, prejudice, or vanity, could so bias such men as to induce them to make false assertions of facts, in which they were liable to detection by all who envied their talents, coveted their situations, or disliked their peculiar views. Why then should I doubt the accuracy of the critics of the New Testament, or turn a deaf ear to the argumentation of Butler or Paley?

EDWARD.

But had the enemies of Christianity been as well versed in these subjects as its clerical advocates, the result might have been very different.

MR. B.

This is mere assumption; and I have equal right to assume, in reply, what appears to me a much fairer conclusion; that had the enemies of Christianity read and thought more, they would have written less. In some cases, we know that increased knowledge of the subject has produced a very different result; it has not only silenced, it has converted the enemies into the friends of Christianity.

EDWARD.

Do you then think the works of its advocates are to be received in the same manner as if they

had been the productions of persons to whom the result were a matter of indifference ?

MR. B.

I think considerable allowance is always to be made for prejudice, as arising from the circumstances of birth, education, disposition, and habits of life; in the case of the clergy, also from attachment to their profession; and, in some cases, for a predilection to certain courses of study in preference to others, and to peculiar lines of argument, which they have themselves invented or greatly improved. But I think they ought to be fully acquitted from the sweeping charge of acting from those interested motives which their enemies delight to impute to them; and am fully persuaded that nothing but strong conviction would have produced the greater part of the many very able treatises which have been written in defence of Christianity. To their works, therefore, I would give all the attention which the character of the authors as well as the importance of the subject demands; remembering, however, that, as men, they were liable to be mistaken—as the abettors of a system, still more so. Their statements of facts, in cases where I was unable to verify them by an appeal to the original sources of information, I should be disposed to admit; their reasonings on those statements I should wish to examine as strictly as possible; and mere declamation I should reject altogether.

BEATRICE.

With this I shall be quite satisfied.

EDWARD.

And I also.

MR. B.

Perhaps you may; but I am not: for we have hitherto considered prejudice and interest as directed only in favour of Christianity; but some of its most distinguished opponents have been, most unquestionably, both interested and prejudiced against it. What was the moral character of the French philosophists who attacked it? What sort of men have the English Deists in general been? If you would take a just view of the subject, you must bear this in mind also; and consider how far its opponents have had knowledge of the religion in question; from what sources they derived it; how they were situated; what had been their habits of life; how far they were competent judges—considerations which will make no sceptic eager for an inquiry into the degree in which interest and prejudice have affected the question. The language of this religion is, “If any man will do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God or of man”—a position as reasonable as it is pious; but, among all the sceptics, where have we seen that reverent anxiety to ascertain the will of God, and to do it? You have also particularly directed your arguments against the clergy of the Church of England, as interested and prejudiced advocates: you must however remember, that it is not they alone who are the defenders of Christianity: those of every other church do the same,

in whatever circumstances they may be ; and you must allow, that this agreement, in those who in other respects differ widely, gives a strong presumption in favour of Christianity. From the length of time this subject has detained us, I shall not press this upon you, but only remind you of two other particulars, not lightly to be passed over by you.

EDWARD.

What are they?

MR. B.

That whatever deductions you now make on the score of interest and prejudice, only increases ten-fold the force of an argument hereafter to be urged on behalf of Christianity—the testimony of those who in privation and suffering maintained the truth of the Christian religion.

EDWARD.

And the second?

MR. B.

That the defence of Christianity has by no means been exclusively in the hands of its ministers ; for there have existed a considerable number of laymen, to whom the greater part of your objections are wholly inapplicable, who have, directly or indirectly, maintained its truth, and those men of the very highest order, neither the superficial nor the vain, neither bigots nor enthusiasts nor fanatics. I leave you to consider the names of Selden, Hale, Bacon,

Milton, Boyle, Newton, Locke, Addison, Lyttelton, West, Johnson, Beattie, and Sir W. Jones; and these are merely taken from those who have flourished in our own country, and during the last two centuries.

CONVERSATION IV.

BEATRICE.

WE hope you are now at liberty, my dear sir, to enter upon such a development of the evidences of Christianity as may be best adapted to our use.

MR. B

I begin then by first stating what it is my intention to establish, and what I require to be granted me, in order to enable me to do so. My object is merely to exhibit a plain view of some of those facts and arguments which have most powerfully influenced my own mind, and which it appears to me ought equally to influence yours. I shall not pretend to give you *all* the facts which have been thought to elucidate the subject, and which have already been collected for that purpose; still less is it my intention to attempt the collecting *all* the arguments, which would be almost an endless task; but I shall not keep back a single objection, nor suppress a single circumstance which it appears to me ought to deserve consideration. But, even with these limitations, it will be necessary that we restrict our inquiries to the simple question, as to the truth of the Christian religion, without entering into those of natural

religion, or of the consequences which must follow as to doctrines, if Christianity be true.

EDWARD.

You assume, then, the existence of God, and the immortality of the soul?

MR. B.

The general belief in these points authorises me so to do. The first *must* be true, and the second at least sufficiently probable for my argument; and as I know you have both of you read Paley's "Natural Theology," and "Tremaine," I shall refer you to those works as sufficiently establishing them, and other preliminary points which are necessary. The latter is at once interesting and instructive: the former above all praise.

BEATRICE.

You will begin, then, with the quotation given in Tremaine from Paley?

MR. B.

I shall, but do not bring it forward at present. I begin with the mere matter of fact that Christianity exists. For this *fact* there must have been some *cause*, and that cause is what it is necessary to ascertain.

EDWARD.

But though Christianity exists, who shall say

what is Christianity. The Christian world is split into ten thousand sects, which only agree in maintaining that the religion itself is true.

MR. B.

But if I say that Christianity is the religion founded by Jesus Christ, about 1800 years ago, in Judea, upon the basis of Judaism, and that by its excellence it prevailed over all other religions, to the extent now manifest,—would not all these sects agree with me?

EDWARD.

Certainly ; but I believe it is doubted by some whether such a person ever existed ; and your statement cannot therefore be admitted as true, in itself, without proof.

MR. B.

And what proof do you require ?

EDWARD.

The same which would be necessary to establish any historical fact.

MR. B.

Is not the agreement of the Christian world upon it sufficient to establish it ?

EDWARD.

Their agreement only proves their belief, and that belief only leads us to infer the probability

that it is founded upon some adequate cause: I should prefer the belief and testimony of enemies.

MR. B.

And that you have; for but very few persons have been hardy enough to deny the fact.

BEATRICE.

What account do they give, then, of the matter?

MR. B.

Their assertion is, that no such person as the reputed Founder of this religion ever existed; that, in short, it was merely a symbolical representation of the sun which gave rise to the generally received accounts, and that the leading events of his life are to be taken allegorically, as referring to the heavenly bodies.

BEATRICE.

And is there any trace of this conjecture to be found in history?

MR. B.

Not the least; and from the works alone of the enemies of Christianity we may prove the truth of the Christian statement.

EDWARD.

I should very much wish that to be done.

MR. B.

You shall have your wish. I would, however,

Observe first, that there are three considerations of very great importance in this inquiry relative to the Christian statement ; for, in the first place, we possess a series of Christian records, the genuineness of which is unquestionable, up to the very time when this religion first appeared, in which the same statement now made by the Christians of our time is affirmed. Again; there has been no interval in which documents of this kind did not exist; and therefore we trace up the assertion of the fact by the Christians of every age, even to the very century in which the religion is said to have been first promulgated ; and, lastly, as the period assigned for the origin of this religion is one upon which perhaps more light has been thrown than on any other of those greatly removed from our own, no such suspicion rests upon the truth of these statements, as might have arisen had the period assigned been indefinitely removed, or involved in great obscurity.

BEATRICE.

These circumstances are so strongly in favour of the Christian statements, that, unless counter declarations can be produced by the enemies of Christianity, their testimony must be received.

MR. B.

Let us, then, turn to the accounts of the four great classes of those who have rejected Chris-

tianity; the Deists of the last three centuries, the followers of Mohammed, the Jews, and the Pagans. With regard to the first of these, their information on the subject must be derived from sources equally open to us; and therefore their opinion, when unsupported by authorities of earlier time, is only of value as their opinion, and, consequently, if unfavourable to the Christian statement, could not weigh against the positive testimony given by the writers of preceding ages, that such was the belief in their time. But though their opinion if adverse would not materially affect the Christian statement, their opinion if in agreement with it must have weight, because we may reasonably conclude, from their rejection of Christianity, they would not have received the Christian statements as true, had they not appeared to them to have the force of truth. Turning, then, to the works of the Deistical writers, we find that the modern opinion by some adduced against the fact of the existence of Christ, has not obtained generally among them; in fact, very few indeed have entertained it; and consequently, from the conduct of the Deists themselves, we may reasonably conclude there is no solid foundation for it.

EDWARD.

It is only surprising that the objection should have ever been brought forward at all.

MR. B.

Proceeding to the next class of antagonists, we find the followers of Mohammed refer to the great work of the founder of their religion, as the supreme authority on this subject. By him, however, the existence of Jesus Christ is not only acknowledged, but assumed as an essential part of the foundation on which his own claims are established. The country, the life and reputed death of the Founder of Christianity, must therefore at that time have been well known to be the same as at present believed.

BEATRICE.

This also carries us up to the beginning of the seventh century, and establishes the belief of the Christian statement at that period in the very countries where our Lord is said to have lived.

MR. B.

The testimony of the next body of adversaries is important, as being that of the descendants of those who had once possessed that country, and "of whom, as touching the flesh, Christ came," and in substance it agrees with the statement of the Christians; for they allow that Christ was the founder of the religion which bears his name, and that he was put to death by their ancestors, before the destruction of Jerusalem. Now this last event is well known to have taken place in the year 70, and therefore it becomes certain, that the origin

of Christianity could not have occurred later than a few years of the period assigned by its advocates.

BEATRICE.

Do the Jews assign no particular period for the appearance of Jesus ?

MR. B.

They do; but as they differ among themselves, and are proved by the testimony of all other nations to be most careless as to their chronological statements, we can place no dependence on the date assigned by the majority, which is considerably earlier than that given by the Christians, and is positively contradicted by the testimony of another body of adversaries, on which greater reliance can be placed.

EDWARD.

From what particular authors do you obtain this information ?

MR. B.

From authority which the Jews hold in the highest estimation, that of the Talmud, the date of which may be referred to the year 500, and which, from the bitterness of its language against the Founder of Christianity, shews the compilers of it did not possess the power to deny the facts above mentioned; whilst it leads us to suspect the truth of the imputations they cast upon him, and which you may see in Lardner.

EDWARD.

Then do you think it just to receive their declarations in the one case, and not in the other?

MR. B.

There is a probability in favour of the former, which there is not as to the latter. On referring to the passages in question, you will find that the anecdotes bear such internal marks of falsity, that had they appeared at an earlier period they could hardly have been credited by any one; but we have a further confutation of them in the fact, that previous assailants of Christianity, as devoted to their own faith as the compilers of the Talmud, and much more acute, have not left the slightest trace of their knowledge of any such transactions, which they hardly could have failed to mention if true.

EDWARD.

But what authority have these previous authors with the Jews?

MR. B.

The Mishna, which was compiled by Rabbi Jehudah Hakkadosh, about the year 180, holds the highest place, and contains no proof against Christianity drawn from false statements, on the part of its friends, and casts no imputation of immorality on its Founder. It only laments the decline of religion, intimates its fears from the prevalence of the new faith, and confirms the fact

of the destruction of Jerusalem having taken place at the time usually assigned.

BEATRICE.

We have, then, the testimony of the Jews, as well as of the Mohammedans, to the truth of the Christian statement.

MR. B.

There yet remains the testimony of the advocates of that religion which was overthrown by Christianity; they therefore cannot be less likely to state the truth than either of those already considered. Here, indeed, we have no work acknowledged by them as of supreme authority, as in the two last cases; and we must therefore trace the vestiges of Christianity, step by step, from the time of the last Pagans to the time when it first made its appearance.

EDWARD.

Those, however, who lived subsequently to the establishment of Christianity as the religion of the state, can hardly be of so much importance as those who preceded them.

MR. B.

The state of the Pagans under the Christian emperors, though certainly very unfavourable to them, was not, however, of such a nature as to preclude their giving us considerable information as to their opinion of Christianity, and the state

n which it had existed previously to its establishment. The very manner in which they write respecting it, proves as well that they were under no constraint as to this expression of their opinions, as that they were not biassed in favour of the religion of the court.

BEATRICE.

But if they were men of character, surely their rejection of Christianity, under such circumstances, ought to have great weight, since they lived near the times in which truth could best be discovered; and interest must have prompted many to embrace the new religion.

MR. B.

It is not without weight; but this is not the place to consider it: we must pursue the more immediate object before us, viz. the obtaining certain knowledge as to the state of Christianity in their times and those which preceded them.

EDWARD.

It may, however, be conceived, they would not speak fully their opinion as to their own times.

MR. B.

Let us refer to facts. In the fifth century Proclus published eighteen arguments against the Christian religion, or rather against one tenet of it, that the world had not existed from

eternity. The works of Zosimus manifest the most bitter hatred of Christianity, undisguised and unsoftened; and Hierocles so far provoked the popular feeling as to suffer severely from their indignation. Rutilius scruples not to attack the monastic system, at that time becoming very popular, using no very measured expressions.

“What new mischief do we see, worse than the sorceries of Circe? She metamorphosed the bodies of men into the shape of swine: this religion makes men brutes all over.”—*LARDNER’S Test. of Ant. Heath.* clviii.

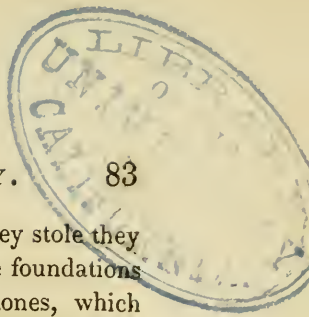
BEATRICE.

This would hardly have been tolerated in some countries now.

MR. B.

Eunapius, who lived at the close of the fourth century, speaks not less freely. I give you Lardner’s translation, and refer you to him for further information.

“And not only was the sacred worship abolished, but the sacred fabrics were thrown down, and all things had the same end with the vanquished giants in the fables of the poets: and the temples at Canopus underwent the same fate, Theodosius then reigning, Theophilus presiding over the affair, Euetius at the same time governor of civil affairs, and Romanus general of the soldiery, who, having never so much as heard of war, vented all their anger against stones and statues, and levelled the temple of Serapis to the ground; and rifling away the consecrated oblations, they gained a complete, though never contested and bloodless victory. For they fought so valiantly with statues and consecrated donatives, that they not only overcame them, but plundered them and carried them away.



And it was a part of their discipline, whatever they stole they kept concealed. They only carried not away the foundations of the temple, by reason of the weight of the stones, which rendered them not easy to be removed. Thus these warlike and courageous champions, overwhelming all things with confusion and disorder, but foully defiled with avarice, gave out that they had overcome the gods, and boasted of their sacrilege and impiety. Then they introduced into the sacred places a sort of people called monks,—men, it is true, as to their outward shape, but in their lives swine, who openly suffered and did ten thousand wicked and abominable things. Nevertheless, to them it seemed to be an act of piety to trample under foot the reverence due to the sacred places: for every one that wore a black coat, and was content to make a sordid figure in public, had a right to exercise a tyrannical authority: such a reputation for virtue had this sort of men attained. But of these things I have already spoken in the *Universal History*. Then monks were settled at Canopus; who, instead of deities, as conceived in our minds, compelled men to worship slaves, and those not of the better sort neither. For picking up and salting the bones and skulls of those whom for many crimes justice had put to death, they carried them up and down, and shewed them for gods, and kneeled before them, and lay prostrate at their tombs, covered over with filth and dust. There were some of them (called martyrs, and ministers, and intercessors with the gods,) slaves that had served dishonestly, and been beaten with whips, and still bore in their corpses the scars of their villanies. And yet the earth brings forth such gods as these.”—*LARDNER*, c. liii.

You will not, I think, after this specimen, suspect the Pagan testimonies of any undue predilection in favour of Christianity, nor of any reluctance to conceal what they deemed its weaknesses.

EDWARD.

It is also evident, that though the popular feeling was turned against idolatry, there yet remained a strong body of the philosophising Pagans, who preferred it to Christianity.

BEATRICE.

They also give a very disgusting picture of Christianity.

MR. B.

It is drawn by the hand of an enemy, you must recollect; the next testimony I shall cite gives somewhat a different idea: Ammianus Marcellinus, in one place, speaks of the office of a Christian bishop as "*recommending nothing but justice and lenity;*" and in another, still more expressly reasons against the luxury of the metropolitan prelates.

"But they might be happy indeed, if, despising the grandeur of the city, which they allege as an excuse for their luxury, they would imitate the life of some country bishops, who, by their temperance in eating and drinking, by the plainness of their habit, and the modesty of their whole behaviour, approve themselves to the eternal Deity, and his true worshippers, as men of virtue and piety."—*LARDNER*, c. li.

Speaking of Constantius, he gives this character of the religion itself:—

"The Christian religion, which is in itself plain and simple, he adulterated with a childish superstition: for studying it with a vain curiosity, instead of a sober modesty, he raised many

dissensions, which, when caused, he cherished and increased by a strife about words."—*LARDNER*, c. li.

BEATRICE.

These extracts give a very different impression to the last ; there is a distinction evidently drawn between Christianity and corruptions of it.

MR. B.

The whole of this author's statements are so accordant with those of the Christians, that I wish time permitted my giving more ; but I must content myself with observing, that he speaks of the Christian sects being very bitter against each other, and conveys the idea of Christianity being decidedly the religion of the great body of the people, and yet he praises Valentinian, because

"He stood neuter between all the diversities of religion, and was troublesome to none ; nor did he require any one to follow either this or that. Nor did he strive by severe edicts to bend the necks of his subjects to his own way of worship ; but left matters untouched in the condition he found them."—*LARDNER*, c. li.

EDWARD.

There is, however, in these extracts, little reference to the state of Christianity before the time of its establishment.

MR. B.

There is ; but even silence here becomes important ; for had the Christian accounts been false, as to leading facts, we can hardly suppose they would

have been passed over by authors like those we have referred to. The gradual decline of Paganism afforded ample time for full investigation; and certainly, of all persons, the philosophers of Alexandria and Athens had the best means of detecting falsehood, had it existed; and we may, therefore, regard their silence as strongly corroborative of the truth of the Christian statements as to the origin and progress of the religion.

BEATRICE.

There does not appear any trace of Christianity having been promulgated by means similar to those employed by Mohammed. Idolatry was indeed put down; but there is no proof that conversion was pressed upon the people, though the example of the court must have had great influence.

MR. B.

The next authority to be produced will not make this conduct of the Christians less remarkable. Libanius, in his funeral oration on the emperor Julian, has the following memorable passage, which clearly shews in what state Christianity had been in the earlier stages of its progress.

“Having paid all honours due to Constantius, he began with remedying matters relating to the gods, sacrificing in the view of all, and expressing his satisfaction in those who followed him, and deriding those who did not, and endeavouring to persuade them to imitate him, but without compulsion. Indeed,

they who were in wrong sentiments werè filled with fear, and expected pulling out of eyes, beheadings, and rivers of blood flowing from innumerable slaughters; and that this new lord would find out new ways of torture; and that fire and sword, and drowning and burying alive, and amputation of limbs, would be trifling things: *Such things had been practised by those who went before*; but now more grievous things were expected. But Julian dissented from those who had practised such things, as not obtaining the end aimed at; and he was sensible that no benefit was to be expected from such violence. For men labouring under diseases of the body may be relieved by bandages; but a false opinion about the gods is not to be expelled by cutting and burning; and if the hand sacrificeth, the mind reproves the hand, and condemns the infirmity of the body, and still approves what it approved before. There is only an appearance of a change, but no real alteration of sentiment. Moreover, they who comply are pardoned afterwards, and they who die (under torture) are honoured as gods.

“Considering, therefore, these things, and observing likewise that *their affairs had been increased by slaughters*, he declined what he could not approve of. Thus he brought over all to the truth who were to be persuaded; but did not compel those who were in love with falsehood.”—*LARDNER*, c. xlix.

EDWARD.

This is indeed very important testimony. There is no mention made here of any cause for persecution, beyond the holding these sentiments; nor of any cause of success on the opposite side, beyond the endurance of sufferings.

MR. B.

We have also an oration by the same author, on behalf of the temples, which is translated at

length in Lardner, and which establishes some very important facts in addition to the above, one of which is, that Christianity was at that time the *prevailing religion, and heathenism in a weak and declining state*; and another, that the Christian laws “*do not permit persecution, but commend persuasion, and condemn compulsion.*”

BEATRICE.

But does not the appeal to Christian principles imply some degree of persecution existing?

MR. B.

The oration is addressed to Theodosius, and the occasion of it was the pulling down of some temples, without the express orders of the emperor. That no *authorised persecution* of the Pagans took place, and that the emperor did not sanction any outrages which the populace might perpetrate under the pretext of zeal for Christianity, is abundantly manifest from the whole oration; but one passage is so remarkable, that, notwithstanding the time already spent in examining extracts upon this subject, it cannot be omitted. He asserts that those who had suffered from Christian zeal were not liable to penalties from having acted contrary to law: and continues—

“Of which there would have been some appearance, if you, O Emperor, had published a decree to this purpose. ‘Let no man within my empire believe in the gods, nor worship

them, nor ask any good thing of them, neither for himself nor for his children, unless it be done in silence and privately; but let all present themselves at the places where I worship, and join in the rites there performed. And let them offer the same prayers which they do, and bow the head at the hand of him who directs the multitude. Whoever transgresses this law shall be put to death.' It was easy for you to publish such a law as this; but you have not done it, nor have you, in this matter, laid a yoke upon the souls of men. But though you think one way better than the other, yet you do not judge that other to be an impiety for which a man may be justly punished. Nor have you excluded those of that sentiment from honours, but have conferred upon them the highest offices, and have given them access to your table to eat and drink with you. This you have done formerly and at this time: besides others, you have associated to yourself (thinking it advantageous to the government) a man who swears by the gods, both before others, and before yourself; and you are not offended at it; nor do you think yourself injured by those oaths; nor do you account him a wicked man who placeth his best hopes in the gods."—*LARDNER*, c. xlix.

EDWARD.

Yet, ultimately, Paganism was suppressed by the emperors.

MR. B.

It was not so much suppressed by them, as it was left by them to its own strength for defence, and sunk, in consequence, gradually, as might have been expected. The countenance afforded by the emperors to Christianity was, undoubtedly, of the greatest consequence to it; but it must be remembered, it was not they who made the new religion powerful in the first instance; the first and

great steps had already been made by the new faith; it had been found invincible before the state joined its strength to it. Indeed it is very questionable whether some of the emperors ever would have advocated it, had they not felt its influence to be irresistible.

BEATRICE.

You regard, then, the patronage given to Christianity as the *effect*, not the *cause*, of its general reception?

MR. B.

Certainly; though I am willing to allow, that the countenance thus given to it materially contributed to its *universal* reception afterwards.

BEATRICE.

But do you think, had the court continued Pagan, that Christianity would have supplanted Paganism?

MR. B.

In reality it would, though not in appearance; arguing from the state in which the two religions were at the commencement of the third century; the nominal change of the religion of the state might have been retarded, but it could not have been prevented: the principles on the side of Christianity had proved themselves too powerful for any weapons which Paganism was able to produce.

EDWARD.

The light which is thrown on the subject by the quotations you have produced, appears to me calculated to give great interest to a further investigation of the causes which could have led to so remarkable a result.

BEATRICE.

One would naturally suppose theré must have been great strength in Christianity, or great weakness in Paganism; since whatever advantage the protection of the state afforded to the first after its establishment, appears, by the statement of Libanius, to have been afforded to the other previously, with the addition of severe suffering being inflicted on those who professed Christianity.

MR. B.

The statements of the heathen writers who lived subsequently to the establishment of Christianity, appear fully to bear out the truth of the Christian statements, so far as they go. We find in them no trace of Christianity having arisen at a different time, or under different circumstances from those alleged; no intimation of there being any doubt then entertained upon this subject. It appears certain, also, that the avowed tenets of the Christians, as to persecution, were the same as what its apologists now state; and from all that we can collect from the remaining documents

of their enemies, we have every reason to believe, Christianity at the time of its nominal establishment was received by great numbers, throughout the whole extent of the empire, and had not attained that general reception by any other means than the strength derived from the very principles of the religion itself.

EDWARD.

Do you then think the majority of the inhabitants of the Roman empire had embraced Christianity before the declaration of Constantine in its favour?

MR. B.

By no means; for the embracing it was attended with penalties too terrible for such a general reception among those who were indifferent as to religion: but it appears to me certain, that there was so general a reception of it among those who did feel an interest in religion, as to give it the greater force. You must measure the strength of a religious party not by mere names or appearances, but by the numbers of those who really are attached to it, and the degree to which they are attached. Considered in this point of view, there can be no doubt that the Christians were decidedly the most powerful religious party in the empire; for their numbers are sufficiently attested both by friends and foes; and their attachment to their faith not only withstood the most violent

attacks, but wearied out their persecutors. The result proved, that the means employed for its subversion were wholly ineffectual. The ease with which Paganism was supplanted by Christianity in the first instance, under Constantine, and the readiness with which the empire reverted to this religion, after all the labours of Julian to overthrow it, immediately upon that emperor's death, prove decidedly that the Gospel, which in its commencement had been but as a grain of mustard seed, had struck deep root, and spread forth its influence through all lands.

CONVERSATION V.

MR. B.

IN our last conversation we satisfied ourselves as to the existence of Christianity up to the time of the emperor Julian, and found no evidence of its having had any other origin than what is commonly assigned. In further tracing the vestiges of this religion, you must be aware, from the very nature of the case, that we cannot reasonably expect such strong evidence as we have had in the preceding part of our inquiry.

EDWARD.

Certainly; if Christianity was originally professed only by an obscure and despised sect, in a remote province of the Roman empire, it would be unreasonable to expect it should attract that attention which it afterwards obtained, when it became the religion of a material portion of the whole people.

MR. B.

It is also probable, that if such were its origin in the first instance, it would "be every where spoken against:" for we know that there was a general prejudice against the Jews; and the Christian statement, as to the death of its Founder, was not likely to allure the votaries of the esta-

lished superstitions. From the testimony of Libanius, it appeared that the Christians previously to their obtaining the ascendancy had been cruelly persecuted; and it hence becomes by no means improbable that they were also calumniated; and the more so, if the hatred of the Christians to idolatry, which we have already seen, was manifested during the period in which the power remained in the hands of its abettors. But let us now turn from conjecture to examination, and we shall find the truth of these observations confirmed by facts. During the latter part of the period under consideration, Christianity was an object of the greatest interest, and its opposers were equally anxious to overthrow its principles, and intimidate its professors into a renunciation of them. During the second century it was by no means so much the object of general attention; for its success was not then so decided as to threaten the subversion of the established creed; and in the first we only find such traces of it as might have been expected would remain of a sect which had its origin in a country, the inhabitants of which were generally disliked, and the religion of which was not understood.

BEATRICE.

But does the increased knowledge of Christianity which the Pagans had, in consequence of its universal dissemination, prove favourable to it?

MR. B.

It does; inasmuch as accusations of horrible crimes, practised by the Christians at secret meetings, were afterwards laid aside as untenable, although the disposition of its enemies yet remained unchanged.

BEATRICE.

And is there no trace of any other origin than the one commonly assigned to Christianity, perceptible in their writings?

MR. B.

Not the least; but abundant confirmation of the Christian statements on the subject.

BEATRICE.

But what sort of writers are those which thus corroborate them?

MR. B.

The works in question may be divided into three classes. Imperial edicts relative to the Christians; the works of professed antagonists of Christianity; and, lastly, those of writers who incidentally allude to it.

BEATRICE.

Have the first come down to us entire?

MR. B.

Unfortunately they have not. Lactantius re-

lates that Ulpian, who flourished at the beginning of the third century, made a collection of the edicts against them, which he inserted in his work on the Duty of a Proconsul; but this being no longer extant, we are forced to content ourselves with the fragments which yet remain interspersed in the writings of contemporary authors.

EDWARD.

But can we rely on such evidence, if transmitted only through the medium of Christians?

BEATRICE.

According to the conclusions drawn in a former conversation, we must (provided there is no internal evidence militating against them), since the facts must have been matters of public notoriety; and it is not likely in such a point the Christians would run an unnecessary risk of exposure.

MR. B.

And in this case, the testimony of Pagans already adduced is greatly in favour of their accuracy; and they also bear the strongest internal marks of genuineness.

EDWARD.

How high does our knowledge of the conduct pursued by the emperors extend?

F

MR. B.

We have mention made by heathen writers of persecutions carried on against the Christians to the first, viz. that of Nero, in the year 67 : but our knowledge of the declared sentiments of the emperors does not extend higher than the year 110, when Trajan appears to have given the *first* general directions as to the conduct which was in future to be pursued by the public officers towards them.

EDWARD.

You speak of the emperors as the persecutors of the church. Are we warranted from the records which have come down to us, in regarding them as such ?

BEATRICE.

Surely not all : there were some excellent men among them.

MR. B.

The conclusion which Lardner draws from a very careful examination of all the remaining documents which can throw light upon the subject is, that

“ Christianity, from the time of its first appearance in the world, was all along in a state of persecution till the time of Constantine.”

He afterwards explains himself more at large as follows :

“ These things are sufficient to assure us, that the Christians

in this period were generally in suffering circumstances, and were liable to suffer.

“ Nevertheless, after all, it is not to be supposed, that persecution was always violent and uninterrupted: there might be some abatements of those troubles, and some seasons of rest and peace: what they were, may be collected from what we have seen in this and the preceding volume; and I shall here reckon them up in a summary manner. We reckon that Nerva was favourable to them, who, when he repealed the other acts of Domitian, repealed also his law against the Christians. His successor, Trajan, published an edict against the Christians, which, as has been often hinted already, never was abrogated, but continued in force so long as heathenism subsisted in the Roman empire. Nevertheless, we can perceive that in the reigns of Adrian and Titus Antoninus there were some edicts or rescripts which were favourable to them; though, during those very reigns, many Christians still suffered in almost every part of the empire. They also received some favour from Alexander Severus and Philip. They might also enjoy peace and tranquillity in the reigns of Commodus and Caracalla, who did not much concern themselves about the affairs of religion. The first years of Valerian, and the reign of Gallienus, after Valerian’s captivity, were favourable to them; as likewise the former part of the reign of Diocletian, when the Roman empire was disturbed by enemies on every side.

“ When therefore I say, that all this while Christianity was in a state of persecution, I am willing that proposition should be understood in a mild and qualified sense.—*LARDNER*, c. xli.

BEATRICE.

Then to whom are the persecutions more particularly attributed?

MR. B.

To Nero, Domitian, Trajan, Marcus Antoninus,

Severus, Maximin the Thracian, Decius, Gallus, Valerian, Aurelian, and, lastly, Diocletian and his colleagues.

EDWARD.

You do not put Julian in this list?

MR. B.

He was in one sense a bitter persecutor of the Christians, for he bent all the powers of a very strong mind to their subversion; but he did not pursue the same cruel method which had been so frequently tried by his predecessors; because he was aware it had turned out to the advantage of the religion he was anxious to overthrow.

EDWARD.

But yet you do not regard him as a tolerant emperor?

MR. B.

He was only tolerant so far as his interest compelled him to be tolerant: he eagerly sought for pretexts to banish the Christian clergy, and by an edict, which the Pagan writers themselves reprobate as cruel and most unworthy of him, prohibited Christians from practising the liberal arts.

BEATRICE.

He must have feared the intellectual as well as the numerical strength of the Christians.

MR. B.

He unquestionably did so : and it is of some importance to our argument to know, that though Christianity sprang from a low and obscure origin, according to the statement of its adversaries, yet when it came to be known, and when persecution was most violent, it yet numbered among its followers men of the first talents and most profound learning.

BEATRICE.

Might not some other cause besides a difference in religion have prompted the persecutions ?

MR. B.

Christianity occasioned not so much a difference of religion as an opposition of religions. Judaism had been freely tolerated, like all other religions which did not interfere with that of the state. But the evident tendency of Christianity was to overthrow all other creeds ; it admitted of no compromise, and consequently no way was left but to put it down by force, or to leave the matter to be decided by time and truth : the passions and interests however of the persecutors were too much pledged in behalf of Paganism to permit them to do the latter, and the former was the necessary result. However shocking the continued persecutions of the Christians may appear to us, it cannot be a matter of surprise, that a religion, the avowed object of which was

the overthrow of all others, should instantly create a host of enemies, little disposed to examine its real character. The Christians themselves, from the earliest times, expected persecutions, as a natural and almost unavoidable result of their profession ; and the wonder is, that, under such circumstances, any should have been induced to embrace it. To those who knew little of it the conduct of such appeared perfect madness : it was commonly spoken of and regarded as such ; but it was also deemed too pernicious a phrensy to be overlooked or neglected.

BEATRICE.

This, then, was a *sufficient* cause ; but might not another have existed in the licentious conduct of the Christians ?

MR. B.

We have no such reason assigned in any of the edicts, nor is any such reason for persecution alleged by the apologists for Paganism, which could hardly have been omitted had the cause existed.

BEATRICE.

Were the sufferings of the Christians in these persecutions very severe ?

MR. B.

They depended, in a great measure, upon the disposition of the governors in the provinces :

in some cases, they appear to have been very great ; but for the details we are forced to depend on Christian writers, in whom we may naturally suppose there was a tendency to exaggerate the sufferings of the faithful.

EDWARD.

But were the persecutions so severe as to become a certain test of the sincerity of the sufferers ?

MR. B.

Of that there can be no doubt : and to some the extremity of their torments would even prove more.

“ Under this head, I cannot omit that which appears to me a standing miracle, in the three first centuries ; I mean that amazing and supernatural courage and patience which was shewn by innumerable multitudes of martyrs, in those slow and painful torments that were inflicted on them. I cannot conceive a man placed in the burning chair at Lyons, amidst the insults and mockeries of a crowded amphitheatre, and still keeping his seat ; or stretched upon a grate of iron, over coals of fire, and breathing out his soul amidst the exquisite sufferings of such a tedious execution, rather than renounce his religion, or blaspheme his Saviour. Such trials seem to me above the strength of human nature, and able to overbear duty, reason, faith, conviction, nay, and the most absolute certainty of a future state. Humanity, unassisted in an extraordinary manner, must have shaken off the present pressure, and have delivered itself out of such a dreadful distress, by any means that could have been suggested to it. We can easily imagine that many persons in so good a cause might

have laid down their lives at the gibbet, the stake, or the block ; but to expire leisurely among the most exquisite tortures, when they might come out of them even by a mental reservation, or an hypocrisy, which is not without the possibility of being followed by repentance, has something in it so far beyond the force and natural strength of mortals, that one cannot but think that there was some miraculous power to support the sufferer.” —*ADDISON'S Evidences*, § vii. No. 4.

BEATRICE.

Does this conclusion appear to you correct ?

MR. B.

It is not an unnatural one for a Christian to make ; but it would hardly be allowed by an antagonist : and therefore I shall only press the point of the sufferings of the primitive Christians as sufficiently attesting their sincerity.

BEATRICE.

But is the fact of their endurance of sufferings sufficiently attested by contemporary and Pagan authors ?

MR. B.

The following quotations perhaps will satisfy you. Marcus Aurelius writes in his *Meditations* :—

“ How happy is that soul which is prepared to depart presently, or to be extinguished, or dispersed, or to remain along with it ! But let this preparation arise from its own judgment, and not from mere obstinacy, like that of the

Christians, that you may die considerably, with a venerable composure, so as even to persuade others into a like disposition, and without noise and ostentation."

In the year 311, Galerius published the following edict:—

"The emperor Cæsar Galerius Valerius Maximian, invincible, august high priest, to the people of the provinces. Among other things which we have ordered, with a view to the benefit and prosperity of the public, we did indeed formerly strive to correct all things according to the ancient laws and established constitution of the Romans; and, among other things, that the Christians, who had forsaken the religion of their ancestors, should return to a right mind: forasmuch as by some means such an obstinacy had seized them, and such was their folly, that they followed not the institutions of the ancients, which possibly some of their own ancestors had appointed; but, according to their own fancy, and just as they pleased, they made laws for themselves, to be observed and followed by them, and in many places they drew over multitudes of people to follow their customs. Wherefore, when after we had published our edict, that they should return to the institutions of the ancients, many have been exposed to danger, and many have been greatly afflicted, and have undergone various kinds of deaths; and forasmuch as great multitudes yet persist in their opinions, and we have perceived that they give not due worship and reverence to the immortal Gods, nor yet worship the God of the Christians; we, duly considering our accustomed mildness and humanity, with which we are wont to dispense pardon to all men, have thought proper readily to hold forth to them this indulgence; that they may at length be Christians, and that they may rebuild the houses in which they have been used to assemble, provided they do nothing contrary to good government. By another letter we shall make

known our pleasure to the judges, for the direction of their conduct; wherefore, agreeably to this our indulgence, they ought to pray to their God for our welfare, and for that of the public, and for their own, that on all sides the public may be preserved in peace and safety, and they may live securely in their own habitations."—*LARDNER*, c. xl.

Eusebius has also preserved the following official letter of Sabinus, at that time prefect of the prætorium, to the governors of the provinces:—

“ The majesty of our most sacred lords the emperors, influenced by the pious and devout principle with which their minds are filled, have long since designed to bring all men to the right and true way of living; and that they who have embraced different usages from the Romans should be induced to give due reverence to the immortal Gods. But such is the obstinacy and perverseness of some men, that neither the justice of the imperial edicts, nor the imminent danger of punishment, could prevail upon them. Forasmuch, therefore, as by this means it has happened, that many have brought themselves into great dangers, our most sacred and powerful lords the emperors, agreeably to their innate piety and clemency, considering it to be far from their intention that upon this account many should be exposed to danger, have commanded us to write this letter to you, and to direct you, that if any of the Christians should be found practising the worship of their sect, you should not bring him into any danger, nor give him any trouble, nor appoint any punishment to him upon that account. *Forasmuch as it has been manifestly found, by the experience of a long course of time, that they cannot by any means whatever be induced to depart from this obstinacy of disposition,* you are therefore to write to the curators and other magistrates,

and to the governors of the villages of every city, that they are no longer to concern themselves in this affair."—*LARDNER*, c. xl.

BEATRICE.

These documents are certainly sufficient to establish the fact of the sufferings of the primitive Christians on behalf of their faith.

MR. B.

You will find some other documents equally interesting in Lardner; but I must now turn to the second class of authors who have given us information as to the state of Christianity, prior to the downfall of Paganism; viz. professed antagonists.

EDWARD.

Their accounts, if faithfully preserved, will hardly have less weight than those of the last class.

MR. B.

Unfortunately, we have only got these works in fragments, owing, partly, to the indiscreet zeal of the early Christians, and, partly, to the neglect into which they fell after the establishment of Christianity.

BEATRICE.

But this is a most serious loss, and reflects heavily upon those who destroyed them. Some of them possibly contained a full vindication of those eminent men among the Pagans who rejected Christianity.

MR. B.

The loss is indeed great, as it is from their writings we draw some of the strongest arguments in favour of Christianity; but we have sufficient remains to shew of what nature were the arguments by which Paganism was defended, and there is every reason to believe that the statement of Chrysostom respecting them is correct, when he says:—

“The books written against Christianity were so contemptible, that they had been all, in a manner, lost long ago. Many of them perished almost as soon as they appeared. But if they are still to be found any where, it is among the Christians.”

EDWARD.

Is there reason to believe that any treatises written by very superior men have been wholly lost?

MR. B.

There is not: the greater part of the treatises which appear to have excited attention on account of the learning and ability displayed in them, viz. those of Celsus, Porphyry, and the emperor Julian, are preserved to us in the replies respectively made to them. Of others, as Hierocles and Fronto, we have only a few passages referred to by Tertullian, Lactantius, and other Christian advocates.

BEATRICE.

At what time did these authors write?

MR. B.

Celsus is supposed to have written his work against the Christians, entitled "The True Word," about the year 176; Porphyry wrote nearly one hundred years subsequently; and Julian about the year 361: so that sufficient time elapsed for the arguments of each to have their weight with the public.

BEATRICE.

Does it appear, from the remains of these authors, that they were men of sufficient acuteness to be regarded as able opponents of Christianity?

MR. B.

They have generally been considered as such. The arguments they make use of are of the kind that reasonably might be expected from persons situated as they were. There can be no doubt that they were most anxious to overthrow the Christian religion; and if the arguments they adduce be not sufficient so to do, we have far more reason to impute their failure to the weakness of the cause than to the folly or negligence of its advocates.

EDWARD

The talents of the emperor Julian are so well known, that it seems only reasonable to infer that nothing more could be adduced against Christianity, in his days, than what he himself brought forward.

MR. B.

Porphyry also appears to have been a man of no common talents or attainments. Of Celsus we know little, but from his work cannot think meanly of his abilities.

BEATRICE.

And what is the sum of the information derived from their works respecting Christianity?

MR. B.

Celsus informs us, that the Christians were at first few in number, but had increased greatly, and divided into parties among themselves; that they were in a state of persecution—their assemblies being forbidden, and the punishment of death hanging over them; yet they continued performing and teaching those things agreeably to their sentiments privately, and that they even died for Christ's sake, for which he derides them. He also fully establishes many of the leading events of the life of Christ. Porphyry speaks of the Christian religion as "*Barbarian temerity*," as "*contrary to the laws*;" and in a work of his on Abstinence, we find him alluding to "some mean people, who, having embraced rules different from their former way of life, will endure to be torn limb from limb, rather than return to their old course; who abstained from some animals, which they once eat greedily, with more care than from human flesh;" meaning the Christians, who abstained from things

offered in sacrifice to idols. Julian speaks of Jesus as the Founder of Christianity; as having been born in the reign of Augustus, at the time alleged by the Christians, and in many other important particulars confirms the truth of the Christian statements.

EDWARD.

We may therefore certainly conclude, that, in the main, the Christian account of the origin of this religion is correct; for it cannot be conceived, that so many acute adversaries would all pass over a false statement on this point, and even confirm it.

BEATRICE

And though the Christians suffered persecution in consequence of their attachment to this religion, yet it prevailed over all opposition.

MR. B.

As we shall have occasion to return to the testimony of these authors again, I shall hasten to give you some specimens of the third class of writers who have given us information on the subject of Christianity.

Spartian, who wrote at the commencement of the fourth century, says, that

“Septimius Severus forbade, under a severe penalty, that any should become Jews. A like edict was published by him against the Christians.”—*LARDNER*, c. xxiii.

Lampridius, who flourished about the same time, informs us, that

“ Alexander Severus tolerated the Christians ; that he designed the building a temple to Christ, and receiving him into the number of the deities, which Adrian also is supposed to have thought of before, who ordered temples without images to be erected in all cities ; which temples, at this very time, because they have no deities in them, are called Adrian’s. And he is said to have prepared them for that purpose, but was forbid by those who consulted the oracles ; they having found, that, if that was done, all men would become Christians, and the other temples would be forsaken.”—*LARDNER*, c. xxv.

Again, speaking of Alexander—

“ When he was about to appoint any to the governments of provinces, or to other like offices, he published their names, inviting the people, if they had any crime to lay to their charge, to produce their evidences ; at the same time declaring, that if any charged what he could not prove, he should be put to death. And he said, ‘ It was a miserable thing, that when the Christians and Jews observed this method of publishing the names of their priests before they were ordained, the like care should not be taken about the governors of provinces, with whom the lives and fortunes of men were entrusted.’

“ When the Christians had seized a spot of ground which was public, and, on the other hand, the victuallers said it ought to be granted to them, he gave this rescript, ‘ That it was better that God should be worshippèd there, in any manner, than that the ground should be granted to the victuallers.’

“ He would often use a saying, which he had heard from some Jews or Christians, and which he well remembered ; and when any one was corrected, he ordered the crier to proclaim, ‘ What you would not have done to yourself, that do not you to another :’ which saying he so highly esteemed, that he ordered it to be engraved upon his palace and upon public buildings.”—*LARDNER*, c. xxv.

BEATRICE.

These circumstances, though interesting, are

however related by authors who lived subsequently to the events.

MR. B.

We will ascend, then, to a more remote period. Galen, blaming a person for not giving a demonstration of certain things which he had advanced, says,

“So that we seem rather to be in a school of Moses, or Christ, where we must receive laws without any reason assigned, and that in a point where demonstration ought not by any means to be omitted.”—*LARDNER*, c. xxi.

And elsewhere,

“It is easier to convince the disciples of Moses and Christ than physicians and philosophers, who are addicted to particular sects.”—*LARDNER*, c. xxi.

Contemporary with Galen, were Ælius Aristides, and Dion Chrysostom, who are supposed to allude to the Christians in passages expressive of contempt and dislike to a new sect at variance with the philosophy and religion of the times. Much more important than their testimony is that of Lucian, who appears to have been acquainted, not only with the Christians, but also with the book of Revelation. In one place he speaks of them along with “atheists and Epicureans,” and says that Pontus was full of them. In another, we have the following passage, speaking of a person named Peregrinus:—

“At which time he learned the wonderful doctrine of the Chris-

tians, by conversing with their priests and scribes near Palestine : and in a short time he shewed they were but children to him, for he was prophet, high priest, ruler of a synagogue, uniting all offices in himself alone. Some books he interpreted and explained, others he wrote, and they spoke of him as a god, and took him for a lawgiver, and honoured him with the title of master. They therefore still worship that great man who was crucified in Palestine, because he introduced into the world this new religion. For this reason Proteus was taken up and put into prison, which very thing was of no small service to him afterwards, for giving reputation to his impostures, and gratifying his vanity. The Christians were much grieved for his imprisonment, and tried all ways to procure his liberty. Not being able to effect that, they did him all sorts of kind offices, and that, not in a careless manner, but with the greatest assiduity: for even betimes in the morning there would be at the prison old women, some widows, and also little orphan children; and some of the chief of their men, by corrupting the keepers, would get into prison, and stay there the whole night with him, and there they had a good supper together, and their sacred discourses. And this excellent Peregrinus (for so he was still called) was thought by them to be an extraordinary person, no less than another Socrates: even from the cities of Asia some Christians came to him, by order of the body, to relieve, encourage, and comfort him; for it is incredible what expedition they use, when any of their friends are known to be in trouble. In a word, they spare nothing upon such an occasion, and Peregrinus's chain brought him a good sum of money from them: for these miserable men have no doubt they shall be immortal, and live for ever; therefore they condemn death, and many surrender themselves to sufferings. Moreover, their first lawgiver has taught them that they are all brethren when once they have turned and renounced the gods of the Greeks, and worship that master of theirs who was crucified, and engage to live according to his laws. They have also a sovereign contempt for all the things of this world, and look upon them as common, and trust one

another with them, without any particular security : for which reason any subtle fellow by good management may impose upon these simple people, and grow rich among them. But Peregrinus was set at liberty by the governor of Syria, who was a favourer of philosophy ; who, perceiving his madness, and that he had a mind to die in order to get a name, let him out, not judging him so much as worthy of punishment.” — “ Then,” as our author says, “ Peregrinus returned to his native place, Parium, in hopes of recovering his father’s estate ; but meeting with difficulties, he made over to the Parians all the estate he might expect from his father, who then extolled him as the greatest of philosophers, a lover of his country, and another Diogenes, or Crates. He then went abroad again, well supplied by the Christians with all travelling charges, by whom also he was accompanied, and he lived in great plenty. Thus it went with him for some while. At length they parted, having given them also some offence, by eating, as I suppose, some things not allowed of by them.” — *LARDNER*, c. xix.

To ascend yet higher ; in the beginning of the second century we have the following supposed allusions to the Christians in Epictetus :

“ When we see a man inconstant to his principles, we say he is not a Jew, but only pretends to be so ; but when he has the temper of a man dipped and professed, then he is indeed, and is called a Jew.” — *LARDNER*, c. x.

The second is more decisive :

“ Is it possible that a man may arrive at this temper, and become indifferent to those things, from madness or from habit, as the Galileans, and yet that no one should be able to know, by reason or demonstration, that God made all things in the world ?” — *LARDNER*, c. x.

EDWARD.

This confirms the received account of the sufferings of the Christians to a very early period, for Epictetus lived in the time of Trajan.

. MR. B.

The two next testimonies are still more important; for they are those of Trajan himself, and the Younger Pliny. They have often been referred to; and it is not easy to evade the conclusion, in favour of the truth of the Christian statements, to which they evidently lead.

“ PLINY to TRAJAN.

“ It is my constant custom, sir, to refer myself to you, in all matters concerning which I have any doubt. For who can better direct me when I hesitate, or instruct me when I am ignorant? I have never been present at any trials of Christians, so that I know not well what is the subject matter of punishment or of inquiry, or what strictness ought to be required in either. Nor have I been a little perplexed to determine whether any difference ought to be made on account of age, or whether the young and tender, and the full grown and robust, ought to be treated all alike; whether repentance should entitle to pardon, or whether all who have once been Christians ought to be punished, though they are now no longer so; whether the name itself, although no crimes be detected, or crimes only belonging to the name, ought to be punished. Concerning all these things, I am in doubt.

“ In the mean time, I have taken this course with all who have been brought before me, and have been accused as Christians. I have put the question to them, whether they were Christians? Upon their confessing to me that they were, I repeated the question a second and a third

time, threatening also to punish them with death. Such as still persisted, I ordered away to be punished ; for it was no doubt with me, whatever might be the nature of their opinion, that contumacy and inflexible obstinacy ought to be punished. There were others of the same infatuation, whom, because they are Roman citizens, I have noted down to be sent to the city.

“In a short time, the crime spreading itself, even whilst under persecution, as is usual in such cases, divers sorts of people came in my way. An information was presented to me, without mentioning the author, containing the names of many persons, who, upon examination, denied that they were Christians, or ever had been so ; who repeated after me an invocation of the Gods, and with wine and frankincense made supplication to your image, which for that purpose I had caused to be brought and set before them, together with the statues of the deities ; moreover, they reviled the name of Christ : none of which things, it is said, they who are really Christians can by any means be compelled to do. These therefore I thought proper to discharge. Others were named by an informer, who at first confessed themselves to be Christians, and afterwards denied it. The rest said they had been Christians, but had left them ; some three years ago, some longer, and one or more above twenty years. They all worshipped your image, and the statues of the Gods : these also reviled Christ. They affirmed, that the whole of their fault or error lay in this ; that they were wont to meet together on a stated day, before it was light, and sing among themselves alternately a hymn to Christ, as a God, and bind themselves by an oath, not to the commission of any wickedness, but not to be guilty of theft, or robbery, or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor to deny a pledge committed to them, when called upon to return it. When these things were performed, it was their custom to separate, and then come together again to a meal, which they eat in common, without any disorder : but this they had forborne since the publication of my edict, by which, according to your commands, I prohibited assemblies. After receiving this account, I judged it more

necessary to examine, and that by torture, two maid-servants, which were called ministers; but I have discovered nothing besides a bad and excessive superstition. Suspending, therefore, all political proceedings, I have recourse to you for advice, for it has appeared unto me a matter highly deserving consideration, especially on account of the great number of persons who are in danger of suffering. For many of all ages and every rank, of both sexes likewise, are accused, and will be accused; nor has the contagion of this superstition seized cities only, but the lesser towns also, and the open country. Nevertheless, it seems to me that it may be restrained and corrected. It is certain that the temples, which were almost forsaken, begin to be more frequented; and the sacred solemnities, after a long intermission, are revived. Victims likewise are every where bought up, whereas for some time there were few purchasers; whence it is easy to imagine that numbers of men might be reclaimed, if pardon were granted to those who shall repent."

"Trajan to Pliny wishes health and happiness. You have taken the right method, my Pliny, in your proceedings with those brought before you as Christians; for it is impossible to establish any one rule that shall hold universally. They are not to be sought for. If any are brought before you and are convicted, they ought to be punished. However, he that denies being a Christian, and makes it evident in fact, that is, by supplicating to our Gods, though he be suspected to have been so formerly, let him be pardoned, upon repentance. But in no case of any crime whatever may a bill of information be received without being signed by him who presents it; for that would be a dangerous precedent, and unworthy of my government."—*LARDNER*, c. ix.

BEATRICE.

This indeed is testimony!

MR. B.

As we are now advancing to the termination of

this part of our inquiries, I shall not stop to make observations on these letters at present ; but give you the last testimonies which I purpose to adduce, viz. those of Suetonius and Tacitus. The first of these says, that in the reign of Nero,

“ The Christians were punished ; a sort of men of a new and magical superstition.”

And, speaking of Claudius,

“ He banished the Jews from Rome, who were continually making disturbances, Chrestus being their leader.”—*LARDNER*, c. viii.

EDWARD.

The inaccuracy as to name and fact here shows that the Christians had not yet excited great attention from their religion.

MR. B.

We now come to the more important testimony of Tacitus :—

“ But neither all human help, nor the liberality of the emperor, nor all the atonements he offered to the Gods, availed to abate the infamy he lay under of having ordered the city to be set on fire. To suppress, therefore, this common rumour, Nero procured others to be accused, and inflicted exquisite torments on those people who were in abhorrence for their crimes, and were commonly known by the name of Christians. They had their denomination from Christus, who in the reign of Tiberius was put to death as a criminal, by the procurator Pontius Pilate. This pernicious superstition, though checked for a time, broke out again, and spread not only over Judea, the source of this evil, but reached the city also, whither flow

from all quarters all things vile and shameful, and where they find shelter and encouragement. At first, they only were apprehended who confessed themselves of that sect; afterwards, a vast multitude discovered by them: all which were condemned, not so much for the crime of burning the city, as for their enmity to mankind. Their executions were so contrived as to expose them to derision and contempt. Some were covered over with the skins of wild beasts, and torn to pieces by dogs; some were crucified; others, having been daubed over with combustible materials, were set up as lights in the night time, and thus burned to death. Nero made use of his own gardens as a theatre upon this occasion, and also exhibited the diversions of the circus; sometimes standing in the crowd as a spectator, in the habit of a charioteer; sometimes driving a chariot himself: till at length these men, though really criminal, and deserving exemplary punishment, began to be commiserated, as people who were destroyed, not out of a regard to the public welfare, but only to gratify the cruelty of one man.”—*LARDNER*, c. v.

To these sufferings of the Christians the two poets, Juvenal and Martial, are generally supposed to allude. The former says—

—————“ Now dare
To glance at Tigellinus, and you glare
In that pitch’d sheet in which such crowds expire,
Chain’d to the bloody stake, and wrapp’d in fire.”

LARDNER, c. vii.

The latter, in an epigram, compares the fortitude of the Christians with that of Mucius.

You will now, I think, not refuse to acknowledge the truth of the following conclusions: but

if you have still any doubts upon them, I would refer you for full proof to Lardner.

First.—It appears a notorious and undeniable fact, that there really did exist, at the time he is said to have existed, an extraordinary character, known by the name of Jesus Christ; that it was commonly reported that he had performed many miracles, and that in consequence of his attaching numerous followers to him, he was put to death; that these followers, instead of being intimidated by that event, asserted that he had arisen from the dead, and, in defiance of all opposition, propagated this new faith throughout the Roman empire with singular success.

Secondly.—That the Romans in general hated and despised this new sect, and oppressed it to a great degree; but that they were also in a great degree ignorant of its origin, its Founder, and its doctrines; and that, consequently, though their testimony, as far as it goes, is of great importance in confirming the statements of the Christian writers, yet the want of their testimony in other particulars cannot militate against nor materially weaken those statements.

Thirdly.—The opinion entertained by men thus prejudiced against the Christians does not in any measure lead us to believe that the latter had any secular views of advantage, directly or indirectly; they represent them as numerous, but not learned, polite, or prudent. A readiness to

meet death, an obstinate perseverance in their opinions, and a devoted zeal in the propagation of their faith, appear to have characterised their public conduct. Their private character appears to have been blameless, and even high, but their doctrines and general spirit utterly contrary to the opinions then prevalent; and that consequently, however desirous they might be to increase their numbers, they did not do it by an appearance of agreement with any of the numerous sects and parties then existing, or by a willingness to blend their own sentiments or compromise their own principles with those of others.

CONVERSATION VI.

BEATRICE.

I HAD no idea, previously to our last conversation, that so many important facts relative to the history of the Christian religion could have been established solely by the testimony of adversaries. Has it ever been attempted before?

MR. B.

There is a very good French work by a learned man of the name of Bullet, which was translated into English by a Mr. Salisbury; but unfortunately both the original and the translation are very scarce, and their authors little known, except to those who make a point of inquiring into works of this kind.

EDWARD.

Your references were commonly made to Lardner.

MR. B.

They were so, as being better adapted for immediate reference than any other, and on account of the reputation that author has justly acquired for correctness.

EDWARD.

It seems, however, that the same facts made a different impression upon the mind of Gibbon.

MR. B.

They did, and there is something very remarkable in his infidelity. We find him confiding almost implicitly in the statements of Lardner, Fabricius, Tillemont, and other laborious investigators into the real history of those times, and treating Voltaire and others like him with quiet contempt; yet desirous, when Christianity was concerned, of believing the latter rather than the former. Gibbon has, in a great measure, enabled us to account for his infidelity; and the facts of the case remain unimpeached notwithstanding his scepticism. You are both of you aware, no doubt, that Dr. Watson published the "Apology for Christianity" in reply to him; a work deservedly popular. In his reply to Davies, Gibbon has made some remarks on others of his antagonists, not destitute of justice; but it is hardly worth your while to spend much time on the controversy. In the *Encyclopædia Britannica* you will find an examination of the reasons assigned by Mr. Gibbon for the success of Christianity; and in the first chapter of Paley's *Evidences* some very judicious observations connected with the subject.

EDWARD.

I do not see how it can be denied, unless all confidence in history be shaken, that Christianity was indeed established at the time, by the person

and under the circumstances alleged, so far as merely the ordinary course of nature is concerned : and it appears certain that the contemporary Pagans regarded the professed belief of the Christians as proceeding from conviction ; so that I would allow the sincerity as well as the zeal of the early Christians ; but we yet appear too far removed from the first century to have any certainty that what we now call Christianity is really the religion originally promulgated by Christ. It appears probable, that for some time it did not excite such attention from those without the pale of the church as would be a security to us that no material alterations, additions, or omissions, had been made in it from time to time.

BEATRICE.

It is even to this day disputed what is Christianity, among those who profess it ; and the answer, that it is the religion founded by Jesus Christ, is not sufficient.

MR. B.

It is only part of the answer which is requisite : and I add, therefore, that Christianity is the religion taught in the New Testament.

BEATRICE.

But do all Christians allow this ?

MR. B.

I think I may say it is universally allowed ; but from the multitudes of sects now existing, which assume the Christian name, it is not in my power positively to assert the fact. I can, however, do what is of more importance ; I can prove that from the earliest times this has been the case with regard to the great mass of Christians ; and as the nature of the subject evidently prevents the possibility of proving more, this ought to be sufficient.

EDWARD.

It will be quite sufficient.

MR. B.

In the first place, then, I must observe, that though we have some information on the subject from the adversaries of Christianity, we must of course look to the Christian writers for the knowledge of what, in their time, was regarded as constituting the sum and substance of the Christian religion : and having established the great facts of the existence of Christianity, at different periods, and under peculiar circumstances, from the testimony of enemies alone, I am certainly at liberty to argue from thence, in order to account for any deficiency of their testimony in other respects. Now when we find the religion in question despised and treated as madness, looked

upon as the offspring of excessive credulity, and regarded as unworthy the attention of sensible men, you cannot be surprised that its enemies should not be acquainted with its authentic documents, and that they should give us little information on the subject.

EDWARD.

From those who more particularly attacked it in their writings we might, however, expect more.

MR. B.

We might, and here we have ; for Julian, Porphyry, and Celsus, do confirm not only the existence of the New Testament, at the periods in which they wrote, but even direct their attacks against its statements and reasonings, as being the great foundation of Christianity.

BEATRICE.

This would establish the fact of its being generally regarded as *one* of the statements on which Christianity rested, but not as being the only one.

MR. B.

But as their attacks do not extend to any other, we cannot infer even the existence of any other, as received by the Christians, as of authority among them ; and by the works of Christian writers we may prove that no other was then so received.

EDWARD.

Will you then establish that point?

MR. B.

We may divide the Christian world into four great classes,—the Protestant, the Roman, the Greek, and the Oriental churches. I need hardly remind you that the Bible, and consequently the New Testament, is the basis of the religion of Protestants; and you will easily ascertain, by referring to the decrees of councils and confessions of faith, that the same is true of the other churches, though they have, in the course of time, made additions unknown to the Christians of an earlier period. Let us then advance to those regions where Christianity was first established, and ascend to those times in which it may be reasonably supposed to have existed in greater purity.

BEATRICE.

But what is the New Testament? How would you define it, relatively to this inquiry?

MR. B.

The New Testament is a collection of writings purporting to give an account of the life and doctrine of the Founder of Christianity, and other important documents relative to his religion, which has in all ages been regarded by Christians as sacred, and of Divine authority.

BEATRICE.

That sacred writings should exist, is probable from most religions having had such ; that such *did* exist, is also probable, from the objections of the adversaries of Christianity being directed against particular statements and doctrines ; but that those which are now regarded as such were the same, can only be established by a complete chain of testimony from that time to this. Can such be produced ?

MR. B.

It can. The objections of Julian and others clearly identify the writings against which they directed their attacks with those now revered by Christians. Our *manuscripts* of the New Testament reach, at least, to the fifth century, if not higher ; and we can both prove the existence of sacred writings among the primitive Christians, and identify ours with theirs. According to the best accounts we have (Pagan and Christian), the four great cities, from which this religion spread itself into all parts, were Antioch, Alexandria, Rome, and Constantinople ; the destruction of Jerusalem having, at an early period, deprived it of the importance otherwise due to it as the mother church. But our manuscripts of the New Testament are traced to these sources ; and beyond the time to which these manuscripts reach we have other means of continuing the chain of evidence to the earliest periods.

BEATRICE.

But if the New Testament be a collection of writings, there must have been a time when those writings were not collected. How far, then, can you trace the New Testament, as an authoritative collection? and what possessed authority before the time of the collection being made?

MR. B.

At the conclusion of the fourth century there appears no reason to doubt, that the collection now admitted as of authority was then so esteemed universally (or with very slight exceptions, which do not affect the main argument as to the truth of Christianity.) At the conclusion of the third century, you will recollect, that the contest between Paganism and Christianity was very violent, and that, from the known state of the Christian world, as ascertained from our former examination, it would be very improbable that all parts of it should be strictly in union with each other as to the details of Christianity, though they would probably agree in the main. We also learn from the Christian contemporary writers, that in the last persecutions their sacred writings were more particularly sought for and destroyed. From the degree to which the Christians were scattered over the empire, it is also probable, that the collections in all cases might not be complete; and if the reverence paid to these writings

depended upon the credit due to their authors (a supposition extremely probable in itself), it seems not unlikely that some parts would be only partially received for a time. Now let us examine into the facts of the case. Augustine, in the fourth century, speaks of the Scriptures being read publicly in the churches as of authority. Cyprian in the third of the same; Tertullian and Justin in the second of the same.

BEATRICE.

The publicity which was given to them is some security for their preservation in the same state.

MR. B.

These writings were also held in the very highest estimation: Cyprian calls them *Books of the Spirit, Divine Fountains, Fountains of the Divine Fulness*. In the preceding century, Theophilus designates them as the *Evangelic Voice*; Clement of Alexandria, as *Sacred Books, Divine Scriptures, Divinely Inspired Scriptures, Scriptures of the Lord, the True Evangelical Canon*; Irenæus also, as *Divine Scriptures, Divine Oracles, Scriptures of the Lord, Evangelic and Apostolic Writings*; and not to mention the additional testimonies of Dionysius, bishop of Corinth, and Justin Polycarp, whose own writings have the greatest weight, as living immediately after the

apostolic times, quotes them as the *Oracles of the Lord*, and as the *Holy Scriptures*.

EDWARD.

But these testimonies only prove the existence of Sacred Scriptures; they do not identify them with ours.

MR. B.

But in addition, the quotations they give from the books they thus speak of at least prove that our Sacred Scriptures contain the same which their Sacred Scriptures did, and therefore there is a very great probability that they are the same.

BEATRICE.

How high is the collected body of writings known under the name of the New Testament thus traced up?

MR. B.

Origen is the first who makes use of the expression; but it was probably used before his time; and the collection is generally acknowledged to have been made at the end of the first century. We trace its collected form also in versions, the earliest of which, the Syriac, was made about that period. You must then observe, that these Sacred writings were received as of authority in all places where Christianity was embraced, by all who bore the Christian name; they were regarded as pos-

sessing an authority to which no other writings could pretend: as such they were publicly explained; translated into various languages; harmonised and commented upon; and in all respects, both by friends and foes, regarded as the foundation of Christianity.

BEATRICE.

But why was this regard paid to them?

MR. B.

Because they were universally believed to be the productions of the first and chosen disciples of Jesus Christ our Lord, and by his followers were also regarded as divinely inspired.

BEATRICE.

Then it must be of the greatest importance to be quite certain that all the books in our collection are the same as all the books in theirs?

MR. B.

It is so; for if not, we can neither prove nor disprove the truth of Christianity; and to this inquiry we must therefore proceed: and being certain they had collections of sacred writings, we must examine whether ours are the same; or, in other words, inquire into the *canon* of the New Testament, and its *integrity*.

BEATRICE.

What is the meaning of the words canon and integrity?

MR. B.

The word canon signifies, in the writings of the fathers of the third and fourth centuries, a list or catalogue, though its primary meaning is a rule. Bishop Marsh's definition is,

"Canonical books signify those which were admitted by public authority into the catalogue of writings destined for the service of the church."—*Notes to MICHAELIS*, vol. i. p. 376.

You must not attach any further sense to the word than this. The inquiry into the integrity of the New Testament relates to the portions of the different books thus esteemed canonical, that we may be certain we have got *the same books in the same state* in which they were originally published.

BEATRICE.

And how is this determined?

MR. B.

By historical inquiry and criticism.

BEATRICE.

I thought criticism had related to the commenting on books?

MR. B.

Sacred criticism is now restricted to ascertaining

the text of the author, and the interpretation of Scripture made a distinct branch, on account of the great importance of each.

EDWARD.

Before you proceed, let me be quite certain that I understand the different portions of the argument which you are now developing. If I understand you aright, it is as follows: Christianity is said by its advocates to be the religion of Jesus Christ as contained in the New Testament, which is a collection of documents professing to be written by his first disciples, and on that account now held to be of the highest authority. From historical evidence, we find that this religion was founded by Jesus Christ, and that his followers in all ages have possessed documents of this nature. It remains to be proved that these writings which we possess are the same which the first Christians possessed, and of which they asserted the authority. If that can be established, we then shall have decided what Christianity is, and shall be enabled to examine its claims to a Divine origin.

MR. B.

You are correct; and we will therefore proceed to examine the evidence which is adduced to prove these assertions. And first, it is necessary to state, that the New Testament we have consists of the following books:

One Gospel, or account of Christ, ascribed to Matthew.

One Gospel ascribed to Mark.

One Gospel, and a continuation, ascribed to Luke.

One Gospel, a general epistle, and two private epistles, and a book of prophecies, professing to be by John.

Thirteen epistles professing to be by Paul, and one without name, ascribed to him.

Two epistles by Peter.

One epistle by James.

One epistle by Jude.

So that, in all, we have eight authors, and twenty-seven books.

All these are alleged to have existed, and to have been generally known from the first century, and to have been received as of authority, wherever they were known, as soon as it was ascertained or believed that they were the productions of the persons whose names they bear. Now in the third and fourth centuries we have no less than twelve catalogues of the books then received in the Christian world as of authority.

Their authors are as follow :

	A. D.
1. Origen, Presbyter of Alexandria.....	210
2. Eusebius, Bishop of Cesarea.....	315
3. Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria.....	315
4. Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem.....	340
5. Bishops at Council of Laodicea.....	364
6. Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis.....	370

	A. D.—
7. Gregory Naz. Bishop of Constantinople.....	375
8. Philastrius, Bishop of Brixia.....	380
9. Jerome.....	382
10. Rufinus, Presbyter of Aquileia.....	390
11. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo.....	394
12. Forty-four Bishops at Council of Carthage.	—

Of these twelve, five, viz. those of Athanasius, Epiphanius, Rufinus, Augustine, and that of the Council of Carthage, are precisely the same as ours; and to these may be added three more, viz. those of Origen, Eusebius, and Jerome; but their accounts will require more particular consideration. The remaining four omit the book of Revelation; and that of Philastrius only has thirteen instead of fourteen epistles of St. Paul, probably omitting the Epistle to the Hebrews.

BEATRICE.

What are the peculiarities of the statements of Origen, Eusebius, and Jerome?

MR. B.

Origen omits the epistles of James and Jude in his catalogue, but owns them both in other parts of his writings.

Eusebius speaks of the book of Revelation as being rejected by some, but retained by others; and with regard to the other books, makes a distinction between those which had always been

universally received, and those which had for a time been only generally acknowledged.

Jerome speaks of doubt as attached by some to the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Upon the statements of each of them I shall hereafter make some observations ; but the whole is now presented to your view at once, that you may see the uniformity of opinion which prevailed during these two centuries throughout the Christian world as to these books ; for we cannot argue from the omission of the book of Revelation in some of their catalogues, to its not being of authority ; for we know that in the Church of England this very book is esteemed canonical, but is omitted in the regular public reading of the Scriptures ; and there appears no reason to doubt, that the peculiar nature of the work was the reason of its omission in the instances before us.

BEATRICE.

Admitting this, which certainly is not improbable, the agreement is decisive as to the authority of books bearing the names of ours ; for I observed, that the writers lived in places widely apart from each other.

EDWARD.

Their names also are of the highest authority. I recollect most of them in Gibbon ; and several were decidedly opposed to each other ; so that I

think there can be no doubt that these books really were then received.

MR. B.

From the wide extension of Christianity, and the uniformity of opinion respecting nearly all these books, we may certainly conclude, that the general dissemination of them must have been effected some time. From the difference in opinion which existed, we may be assured, that there was no collusion in the case : and from the talents and learning of those who give us these lists, we may also rely upon them as not having imposed only upon the unwary and unskilful : but this is not all ; the very disagreement which subsists between these lists, with regard to the Epistle to the Hebrews and the book of Revelation, is of considerable importance ; for it is remarkable, that the Epistle to the Hebrews was only doubted of in the countries most remote from the people to whom it was addressed, and by those least qualified to decide upon it. The Roman Church did not receive it, but Jerome did : and his reason for it is, that in so doing he followed the example of those of an earlier period. Only the writings of the apostles and evangelists were admitted into this canon ; and this epistle having no name attached to it, those who lived in Italy might reasonably doubt, when the Christians in the East, who had received it from their fathers as the work of St. Paul, did not hesitate ; and Jerome, who was well acquainted with the East, and had studied the subject

thoroughly, is to us far greater authority than the bishop of Brixia or the inhabitants of Italy of that period.

BEATRICE.

But the book of Revelation is omitted in the catalogues of those who lived in the East, whilst it is admitted in the West.

MR. B.

The reason of its omission in the first instance I have before given: the reason of its appearing in the second, probably arose from the authority of Irenæus, bishop of Lyons, who was the pupil of Polycarp, the disciple of St. John, and who expressly assigns it to him.

EDWARD.

What are the books mentioned by Eusebius as having been only generally received for a time?

MR. B.

The Epistle of St. James, the 2d of St. Peter, and the 2d and 3d of St. John, and that of St. Jude.

BEATRICE.

These form but a very small portion of the New Testament, as now received.

MR. B.

Were it necessary, we might establish the truth of Christianity without their aid: but the situation

of the Christians during the times of the persecutions sufficiently accounts for the non-universality of the reception of these documents. The caution of the churches in not receiving rashly any thing to which they gave supreme authority, is good security to us, in that they would not ultimately have received them, but from conviction.

BEATRICE.

It might naturally be expected, that when the Christians regarded these Scriptures as divinely inspired, they would be very cautious what books they put into the number.

MR. B.

Undoubtedly; for these Scriptures were to them the rule of life; and the third century was not a time for persons to be indifferent as to the writings on which their hopes were founded. Origen is not only remarkable for his superior learning; he suffered, as well as wrote, in defence of Christianity—and his father had been put to death for it; so that there was every motive for the son to take the utmost care not to be imposed upon by records assuming the authority which these do. He also could hardly be deceived, on account of his superior attainments and peculiar advantages; and so far was he from implicitly following the opinions of others, that he was severely censured for the freedom in which he indulged. His authority,

therefore, as well as that of Eusebius and Jerome, who were well qualified to determine the truth, extends not merely to his own time, but to that before it; and if we have not in the second century regular catalogues like those we have already adduced for the fourth and third, we are not thence to conclude that the collection was not formed—for their testimony implies more; we can only infer that it was not then customary (most probably, because not necessary) to make out particular lists; for we find nearly all these books named, though not in formal catalogues, as having this high authority, by Tertullian, by Clement, who preceded Origen at Alexandria, and by Irenæus, bishop of Lyons, a man singularly well qualified to determine the question, from his connexion with Polycarp.

BEATRICE.

And do these mention *all* the books?

MR. B.

Not all; for they only mention and quote them as their subjects required: but we have very little left to desire. *Tertullian*, the most ancient of the Latin fathers, names and quotes the Four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, as the work of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Of the Epistles of St. Paul he expresses no doubt, except on the Epistle to the Hebrews, which he ascribes to Barnabas. He does not quote the short Epistle to Philemon,

the 2d Epistle of St. Peter, and the 2d and 3d of John; and it is doubtful whether he quotes St. James. *Clement of Alexandria* had travelled through the countries in which the books of the New Testament are said to have been first published; and, living near to the apostolic times, there can be no doubt he had the amplest means of knowing the truth. He had also been educated in the Greek philosophy, and was little likely to have submitted himself to the authority of the New Testament, without full conviction of the justice of its pretensions. His character, his learning, the time and place of his birth, and the events of his life, add great weight to his testimony, which is singularly full. The fragments of his works which remain contain numerous quotations from the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. The Epistle to the Hebrews he expressly ascribes to St. Paul; and leaves only one of that apostle's epistles unquoted, viz. the Epistle to Philemon; which, from its brevity and private nature, was not at all likely to be quoted in the subjects on which he wrote. He quotes also the Epistle of St. James, the 1st of St. Peter, the 1st of St. John, the Epistle of St. Jude, and the book of Revelation.

BEATRICE.

He has only then left unquoted that to Philemon, the 2d of St. Peter, and the 2d and 3d of St. John.

MR. B.

The last writer necessary to be mentioned is Irenæus, who was of Greek origin, and probably born before the conclusion of the first century. We have his testimony to the four Gospels, to the Acts of the Apostles, to the Epistles to the Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, and Titus, duly ascribed to their reputed author. He has no quotations from the Epistle to Philemon, probably from the same cause which in other cases prevented it; and none from that to the Hebrews, for which we have a sufficient reason; for those against whom he wrote were members of the Latin church, which had not then admitted it, and he consequently could not adduce its authority against them. He also quotes the Epistle of St. James, both the Epistles of St. Peter, and the 1st and 2d of St. John. The last of St. John, and that of St. Jude, he does not quote, apparently from not requiring them in the controversies in which he was engaged. Lastly, as was before mentioned, he gives the fullest testimony to the book of Revelation, composed by St. John, the apostle and evangelist.

EDWARD.

This brings us to the age succeeding that assigned to the writers themselves; so that little more testimony can be needed.

MR. B.

There is additional evidence, but it is not necessary for what I wish to establish. The writers who occupy the short remaining period are called the apostolic fathers, from their having been contemporaries of the reputed writers of these books. Their works only enable us to prove the existence of material portions of the books in question; for they do not quote them as the writers already considered were in the habit of doing; so that there are but very few of the books whose authority can be established by them, as the Epistle to the Corinthians.

EDWARD.

It seems, then, that we may divide the history of the New Testament into three periods: the first, that in which it was written and published; the second, that in which it was collected; and the third, that in which it was received as of authority in its collected form?

MR. B.

We may; and beginning with the last, we have seen that it was then universally received as of Divine authority, because the various parts had previously, in the second period, been *generally* so received: and the whole of the testimony adduced gives this reason only for its parts having been so received, viz. because they were genuine, i. e., really written by the persons whose names they bear.

H

EDWARD.

This, however, is only their belief. It does not follow that it is *genuine* because they believed it to be so.

MR. B.

It does not ; but it is a great point gained towards it, that all Christians, in every age, have so regarded them up to the very age immediately succeeding that in which the writings first appeared.

BEATRICE.

But you have only established that books, bearing the same titles as those found in our New Testament, were thus regarded as of Divine authority, because believed to be genuine productions of the persons whose names they bear.

MR. B.

In our next conversation, then, we will consider the parts of those books, and endeavour to ascertain the integrity of the New Testament ; a subject of such great importance, that not only the chapters but even the verses demand the closest attention.

BEATRICE.

That I can easily conceive : for if the supposition of its being not only genuine, but inspired, be correct, too much importance cannot be attached to it.

CONVERSATION VII.

BEATRICE.

WE have now to consider the arguments which are brought forward to establish the integrity of the Scriptures of the New Testament.

MR. B.

The means by which we are enabled to do this consist in the quotations of these writings, the versions which have been made of them, and the numerous manuscripts which are yet extant.

EDWARD.

Is there so much of the New Testament in quotations as certainly to identify the books we have with those which we know were received as of authority?

MR. B.

Abundantly so. Speaking of Tertullian, Lardner says,

“There are perhaps more and larger quotations of the small volume of the New Testament in this one Christian author than of all the works of Cicero, though of so uncommon excellence for thought and style, in the writers of all characters for several ages. And there is a like number of quotations of the New Testament in St. Irenæus and St. Clement of Alexandria, both writers of the second century.”—Vol. iii. p. 435. 4to ed.

In later times, with the increase of Christian

writers, we have of course a corresponding increase of quotations from the sacred writings; and by all these, we are enabled fully to ascertain the fact, that the books we regard as sacred were, in all respects, the same as those which were then esteemed of divine authority.

BEATRICE.

But are there quotations in the apostolic fathers also?

MR. B.

There are. The names of the apostolic fathers are Barnabas, Clement of Rome, Hermas, Ignatius, and Polycarp; and though it is not certain that all the works usually ascribed to these are really genuine, of their great antiquity there can be no doubt; and the passages of the New Testament found in their writings are thus fully attested to have been at that early period received as of authority. Now out of these five, *all* of them quote the Gospel of St. Matthew, the Acts of the Apostles, the Epistle to the Romans, both Epistles to the Corinthians, the Epistles to the Galatians, Ephesians, Hebrews, the Second Epistle to Timothy, and the First Epistle of St. Peter; *four* quote the Gospel of St. Luke, the Epistle to the Philippians, and the First Epistle to the Thessalonians; *three* quote the Gospel of St. Mark, the Epistle to the Colossians, the Second Epistle of St. Peter, and the First Epistle of St. John; *two* quote the Gospel of

St. John, the First Epistle to Timothy, the Epistle to Titus, the Epistle of St. James, the Second Epistle of St. John, and the book of Revelation; and all the remaining book of the New Testament, viz., the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, that to Philemon, the Third Epistle of St. John, and that of Jude, are quoted by some one or other of the five. The writings of all the five also occupy so small a space, that we have reason to be surprised at the number of passages, the authority of which is thus ascertained, and, when we review the whole, can have no doubt that our New Testament does truly contain the real belief of the first Christians; so that by it we may fairly try the pretensions of Christianity to a Divine origin.

EDWARD.

You mentioned the versions of the New Testament as another means of ascertaining the integrity of the New Testament.

MR. B.

The versions are indeed of great importance in corroborating it, and it is necessary that you should have some knowledge of them. They are as follow:—

1. The Peschito or ancient Syriac, made about the year 100.
2. The Philoxenian Syriac, finished in 508.
3. The Jerusalem Syriac, of uncertain date.
4. The Coptic, for the use of Lower Egypt, date unknown.
5. The Sahidic, for the use of Upper Egypt, in the 2d century

6. The Arabic versions, probably made from the 7th to the 11th centuries.

7. The Ethiopic, supposed to have been made in the 4th century.

8. The Armenian, made by Miesrob at the end of the 4th century.

9. Two Persian versions, of which the dates are undetermined.

10. The Latin Vulgate, by Jerome, finished in 384.

11. The Gothic, made by Ulphilas in the 4th century.

12. The Slavonic, by Cyril and Methodius, in the 9th cent.

13. The Anglo-Saxon, made from the Old Latin.

Of these, by far the most important are the Syriac and the Latin; but all are of use, more or less, in enabling us to determine with certainty the integrity of the sacred text.

BEATRICE.

In what respects are the Syriac and Latin versions so peculiarly valuable?

MR. B.

The more ancient Syriac version was made at so early a period, that it does not contain all the books of the New Testament; omitting the Second Epistle of St. Peter, that of St. Jude, the Second and Third of St. John, and the book of Revelation. There can be little doubt, that if not made during the very lifetime of the apostles, it must have been made within a very short period after their deaths. The account given in our copies of the woman taken in adultery, is not to be found in it; but in

all other respects, it bears the most striking testimony to the uncorrupted preservation of our copies.

BEATRICE.

The books omitted are the same as those respecting which some doubt was entertained for a time ?

MR. B.

They are; and perhaps their omission in this collection contributed to strengthen that doubt.

EDWARD.

In what consists the value of the Latin Vulgate ?

MR. B.

The first Latin version was probably made at the beginning of the second century. During the course of time the copies of this version, in consequence of the carelessness of transcribers, became so corrupt, that a revision of it was necessary, and, by desire of Pope Damasus, Jerome undertook the correction of it by the Hebrew. His version being made the standard text of the church of Rome, is generally called the Vulgate; and that which preceded it the Old Italic. Both are of importance in ascertaining the truth of the Greek text, to the manuscripts of which you must now turn your attention, as the last great means of assuring us of the integrity of the New Testament.

BEATRICE.

Are these manuscripts numerous?

MR. B.

So numerous that it is necessary to class them in various ways, the better to ascertain the real text of these books. For this purpose a great number have been carefully examined, and as it was found that some agreed very closely with each other, they have been arranged accordingly. There are also, in all probability, many with which we are not at present acquainted; and, doubtless, many have been lost or destroyed.

EDWARD.

Do all contain the whole of the New Testament?

MR. B.

No, very few; some only the Gospels, others only the Epistles, and others, called Lectionaria, being merely selections of particular parts for the public service of the church.

BEATRICE.

I suppose there must be a great difference between the values placed upon some and others?

MR. B.

There is; the more ancient having much greater authority.

BEATRICE.

Which are reckoned the most valuable, and what is their age?

MR. B.

There are *three* which are decidedly the most valuable; two of which are in our own country, and the third is at Rome.—The Alexandrine manuscript, as it is called, is preserved in the British Museum, and was sent from the East by Cyrillus Lucaris, Patriarch of Constantinople, as a present to Charles I. in the year 1628. It is supposed to have been written in Egypt about the sixth century; according to some, as early as the fourth.—The second of these manuscripts is preserved at Cambridge; having been presented to that university by Beza the reformer, in the year 1581. The date is uncertain; but perhaps the opinion of Bishop Marsh is pretty correct, viz. that it belongs to the fifth century.—The third manuscript is concealed in the Vatican, and is consequently less known than the preceding. It most probably ought to be assigned to the fifth century also. For a more particular account of these and other manuscripts of the New Testament I would refer you to Bishop Marsh's translation of Michaelis's Introduction to the New Testament, Vol. iii. Chap. 8. Exact fac-similes of the two first of these manuscripts have been published, by which we are now secured against the accidents of fire, &c.; and it is most desirable that the Vatican manu-

script should be engraved in like manner, but of this there is little probability.

EDWARD.

And from the examination of these and the other manuscripts, there is found that general agreement with each other, with the versions and with the quotations of the fathers, which warrants the conclusion that we possess the New Testament uncorrupted, and without any material variation from the copies used at the beginning of the second century?

MR. B.

There is ; but, to make assurance doubly sure, there are some other considerations which I must desire you to attend to, viz. that no material corruption of the New Testament could possibly have been effected ; and that the effects of time, and the consequences of negligence, have been sufficiently counteracted by the labours of critics in modern times.

BEATRICE.

Do you indeed think it impossible that the New Testament should have been altered ?

MR. B.

You will also, if you well consider in what an alteration would have displayed itself, and what means there were of effecting it. If any alteration had at any time been made, it must have been

made for some purpose;—to advocate some opinion or other. Now, we know from history, and from the works of those who lived in successive ages, what were the tenets of the various Christian sects, and what were the sentiments of those who may be conceived most likely to attempt alterations. You have seen, even from Pagan statements, the zeal of the Christians in the fourth century for monkery; and the pages of Gibbon will give you abundant testimony as to the weakness and failings of the more celebrated Christians in a later period. Now, with all their zeal for useless or pernicious institutions, their absurd attachment to relics of saints, to the celibacy of the clergy, and a variety of other things, which are wholly indefensible, on the ground of reason or common sense,—why should they suffer the Scriptures to continue the most pointed condemnation of follies like these, if they were in the habit of corrupting them? When, in the course of time the corruptions of Christianity were grown to such a height that they were no longer tolerable, it was by reference to these very Scriptures that those corruptions were detected and exposed by the Reformers. The fact is, that as true learning gradually became extinct, those who were most active in bringing upon the people the system of priestcraft, which so long fettered the human mind, had lost sight of the sacred text; they were not aware of its importance,

and it was forgotten to that degree, that, when it reappeared, it was despised as worthless, or suspected as contrary to the established faith. The invention of printing soon after put it out of the power of any set of men to suppress the knowledge of these most important documents.

EDWARD.

If corruptions of the sacred text had taken place in the dark ages, we certainly might reasonably expect that there would have been some trace of it; but might not important alterations have been made at an earlier period?

MR. B.

Before the establishment of Christianity as the religion of the state, the persecutions must to a great degree have absorbed the attention of the Christians, and it is not likely that any alterations would in times of such severe suffering take place; but supposing they had, of what nature may it be conjectured they would be?

BEATRICE.

Either to soften the religion, so as to make the persecutors relax, or to inspire a greater zeal for martyrdom, so as to make the followers of Christ ready to meet the worst.

MR. B.

But on examination of the works of the

Christians of these ages, we find their own language by no means accordant with that of the New Testament on these points; and the further it is removed from the apostolical times, the more violent it becomes. The New Testament contains a calm and dignified assertion of the nature of the religion it teaches, and its claims to universal reception, but never goes further; and, though it stoops to no artifice to increase the number of its disciples, never needlessly uses the language of contempt or abhorrence which became not uncommon in later times. Of the idolatry and corrupt practices of the world at large it expresses the most decided condemnation, but never goes beyond that to inveigh against those who, before the coming of Christ, had been unable to find out God to perfection. It was not till after Christianity had gained the victory that there was a disposition to accommodate it to the heathen world, and then parties ran too high among themselves to permit any one to effect the corrupting of the Scriptures, or the union of all for this purpose. With regard to martyrdom, it is well known how far the Christians receded from the language of the New Testament. From a readiness to meet death, should it be necessary, they proceeded to court it needlessly, notwithstanding the adverse language of the New Testament. But if any thing could have been inserted in the sacred books, surely

sentiments in accordance with popular prejudice would be the most likely ; and if any thing could safely be obliterated, certainly those texts which are contrary to them would have had the least chance for preservation.

EDWARD.

But is it not supposed by some that there are texts which have been interpolated, to favour peculiar doctrines, where we cannot bring the matter to a decisive issue ?

MR. B.

There is one very celebrated text of this nature, viz. the seventh verse of the fifth chapter of St. John's First Epistle ; but from this very passage a strong argument may be derived for the integrity of the sacred text ; for it is not found in any of the more ancient manuscripts which can be relied upon, nor in any version except the Latin : there are no such quotations of it, where we might have expected to meet with it, as would put the matter out of doubt ; and in Bishop Marsh's Divinity Lectures, there is an account given of it which seems almost to preclude the chance of its being genuine. Yet surely all those Trinitarians who long had the manuscripts of the Greek Testament in their possession, would never have transmitted them to us destitute of a text so decisive of this great controversy, if any thing like interpolation could have been allowed. The

text may possibly have been omitted in some manuscripts by mistake, and the error perpetuated by successive transcription; and as some very learned and upright men have regarded it as genuine, I would not presume to say it was not: but the evidence hitherto brought forward in its behalf appears to me by no means demonstrative.

BEATRICE.

But as there is a difference between manuscripts, there certainly must have been interpolation or omission in some cases; and if in some, why not in more?

MR. B.

That no interpolation to such an extent as to affect the argument of the integrity of the sacred text has taken place, is almost certain, from the general agreement of the manuscripts; and that it could not possibly have been effected, is not less so, from the state in which the Scriptures existed during successive ages, and in which they are now come down to us; for insuperable difficulties attend the hypothesis of any interpolation having been effected. The Scriptures were in the hands of all parties; they formed, in many cases, the only common bond of union among Christians: they were not concealed from the Pagans, except during the persecution of Dioclesian, when it was attempted to destroy them; and none of the Pagans insinuate that any in-

terpolation had taken place, which it is next to impossible they would have omitted to assert had there been the least pretext. The great reverence in which they were held you have already seen, and this must have restrained those who were sincere in such expressions of regard : and who shall dare to say they were not sincere ? Whatsoever might be interpolated to favour one tenet, would instantly excite the attention of those who were opposed to it : and it was altogether out of the power of any man, or set of men, to corrupt *all* the manuscripts, and *all* the versions, in *every* country in which Christianity had spread. All the power of Constantius could not overcome Athanasius, and the whole empire was witness to religious wars, when the Scriptures were the great authority from which alone there was no appeal ; and could such a thing as a universal corruption of these Scriptures have taken place, without any trace of it in the history of the church ? Could every other record of that period also have been so corrupted, that no vestige of such a deed remains, when, from the character of the times, we know that above all others it would be calculated to excite attention ? Lastly, if interpolation was effected at one period, why not at another ? And why do not the manuscripts of different dates exhibit the varying character of the ages to which they are assigned ? If the custom was once begun, why should it end ?

And where did it end? The progress of time certainly did not purify the Church, nor were those who possessed the manuscripts in the tenth-century more scrupulous than those in the fifth.

BEATRICE.

But if errors of this kind do not exist, may not mistakes have arisen in the course of time to such an extent as to have almost the same effect?

MR. B.

That the Scriptures are not exempt from the common lot of all other writings in this respect is certain; but we have some reason to believe that they have not suffered to the same extent: and we have at least the consolation of knowing that they have received more attention, with a view to ascertain the true text, than perhaps all the other books in the world put together.

EDWARD.

Will you explain this more at large?

MR. B.

From being accounted *sacred* books, as you have already seen, the Scriptures have derived the greatest advantage. They have been more frequently and carefully transcribed than any other works, so that we possess a greater number of manuscripts than in any other case; and their singular agreement with each other in all im-

portant particulars, is the most satisfactory proof that can be afforded of the care which has been bestowed upon them. They have also been translated into so many languages, and under such circumstances, that we are fully secured against the errors which might have arisen from similarity of words and letters; and the numerous quotations of them, both with and without comments, give us the clearest insight into the use which was made of them so as certainly to fix the sense.

EDWARD.

But both translators and commentators have taken parts of the New Testament in different senses.

MR. B.

Yet we do not follow either implicitly: we merely use them as a proof in what words the passage was then expressed, or in what sense they understood it.

BEATRICE.

But in what respects has such great care been displayed to ascertain the true text of the New Testament?

MR. B.

All the first critics, from the time of Erasmus to our own, have been employed upon it, and every possible means has been resorted to in order to fix the text as originally delivered. We have now in our hands that which it has been the

work of three centuries to perfect, and to which almost all the greatest names in learning have contributed something. The most valuable manuscripts have been collected and deposited in places of the greatest security ; they have been examined and collated again and again with the greatest care, and the eagerness of each succeeding editor to detect the deficiencies of his predecessors has contributed in a very great degree to elicit the truth. These editors and critics have also been men frequently of the most different sentiments, and the interests of party and influence of private pique have aided their acuteness. Being a matter of fact, and not of mere disputation, all that is essential to the proof of the truth of Christianity is decided ; and we have the testimony of all parties, that though there are an immense number of trivial variations, which clearly prove the independent nature of the manuscripts, there are none that affect the morality, hardly any that affect the statements, and but very few indeed that affect the doctrines of Christianity. It is not by the doubtfulness of any one of these very few texts, that the essential nature of Christianity can be deemed ambiguous ; for no one sect would be willing to own *all* its claims depended upon a doubtful text ; nor is it by any indeterminateness as to matter of fact that the whole religion can be overthrown ; for the New Testament makes no profession of handing

down every particle of it unchanged, as to details of minor importance.

BEATRICE.

From the whole, then, we may safely conclude, that the New Testament has been transmitted to us in a state sufficiently perfect to enable us to judge of the truth of the religion it contains, as evidenced by its own statements ?

EDWARD.

Not yet; for we are not yet certain that the New Testament is indeed the production of the alleged authors : we have only ascertained that it has been handed down to us as such, and with such a degree of correctness as to enable us to decide upon the probabilities of its being really written by the apostles or not, and of its being true or false.

MR. B.

And there is yet another question to be considered before we can enter upon that part of the subject.

EDWARD.

There is indeed ; for, admitting the possibility of these books being what they profess to be, there are other writings which have, if not equal, certainly some claims to examination, since they assume the name of the same authors, or of con-

temporaries, equally able to decide upon the subject.

MR. B.

We will then, at our next conversation, consider whether any other books than these have a right to be regarded as canonical, and whether it is necessary to institute any further examination into their contents, as well as into those of the New Testament.

CONVERSATION VIII.

MR. B.

FROM the view of the subject we before took, it appeared that the books of the New Testament were canonical : we have now to ascertain whether any others besides these books ever were so.

EDWARD.

There has a work been published which professes to be a collection of books which, at an early period, had like regard with those of the New Testament.

MR. B.

The praise of ingenuity might have been allowed, if the idea had been original : but it was a wretched thing to attempt to deceive the public by means, the folly of which had long ago been exposed ; and but a poor excuse to plead ignorance in extenuation of a crime, the very nature of which was connected with research.

EDWARD.

Is it then so certain, that no books have a just claim to be classed as the received canonical Scriptures of the first Christians, but those in our New Testament ?

MR. B.

In some cases it is much easier to shew what is

false than to ascertain what is true: and in the whole range of literary history I hardly know of any thing which can be more fully established, than that no other books but those of the New Testament were admitted by the primitive church as canonical. I cannot conceive any man capable of investigating the matter who could rise from the inquiry with any other feeling than that of the books not contained in the New Testament, and of late brought forward as of equal authority, being destitute of the sanction of the church, and containing in themselves the proof of their own unsoundness.

BEATRICE.

What are the books to which you allude, and by whom do they profess to be composed?

MR. B.

As the Christian religion began to spread, several writings appeared, besides those of the New Testament, professing to be by Christ himself, his apostles, or others intimately connected with them. These writings most probably in a great measure owed their origin to the great interest which necessarily would be attached to every thing proceeding from such a source, and relating to the apostolical times. Some for a time attracted attention, and were read with a deference due to the subject, and not the composition; others were at once rejected; and the

greater number have long since perished. A few, however, have come down to us, and leave us no reason to regret the loss of the rest. Of these, you will find a full account in the admirable work of "Mr. Jeremiah Jones on the Canon," which was originally produced in consequence of Toland's attempt to destroy the authority of the New Testament; but I would recommend to you, Edward, also the careful examination of Fabricius on the same subject.

BEATRICE.

What is the method pursued by Mr. Jones to decide the question?

MR. B.

His proof is drawn up in distinct propositions, of which the following are the enunciations:

PROP. I.—Besides those books which are now commonly received into the canon of the New Testament, there have been many others under the names, either of our Saviour, his apostles, or their contemporaries, which may seem to claim the same authority.

PROP. II.—The greatest part of Christians were very early agreed what books were canonical, and to be looked upon as the rule of faith and practice.

PROP. III.—The main and principal method by which we are now able to determine the canonical authority of any book or books is, by searching into the most ancient and authentic records of Christianity, and finding out the testimony or tradition of those who lived nearest to the time in which the books were written concerning them.

PROP. IV.—Those books which are mentioned in the catalogues made by the most ancient Christian writers of the sacred

and inspired books, are to be esteemed canonical ; and those which are not to be found in any of these catalogues must be esteemed apocryphal.

PROP. V.—Those books are justly esteemed canonical which the first writers of Christianity have cited in their writings as Scripture ; and those apocryphal which they have not.

PROP. VI.—Those books are canonical which the primitive Christians read in their churches or public assemblies as the Scriptures or Word of God.

PROP. VII.—That book is certainly apocryphal in which are found any contradictions.

PROP. VIII.—That book is apocryphal which either contains any histories, or proposes any doctrines, contrary to those which are certainly known to be true.

PROP. IX.—That book is apocryphal in which are contained things ludicrous or trifling ; fabulous or silly relations.

PROP. X.—That book is apocryphal in which are any sort of things mentioned which were later than the time in which the author, whose name it bears, lived.

PROP. XI.—That book is spurious and apocryphal, the style of which is different from, or contrary to, the style of the author whose name it bears, in those which are his known and undoubted writings.

PROP. XII.—That book is spurious and apocryphal whose idiom and dialect is different from the known idiom or dialect of the author whose name it bears, or the country where he lived.

PROP. XIII.—That book is spurious and apocryphal which evidences a disposition or temper of mind in its author different from the known temper and disposition of the author whose name it bears.

PROP. XIV.—That book is apocryphal which for the most part is transcribed or stolen out of another.

PROP. XV.—The translation of the books of the New Testament in Syriac is of very considerable service in determining and fixing the canon of those books.—*JONES'S New and Full Method*, &c. vol. i. pp. 23—85. Oxf. ed.

After having established these propositions, he proceeds to apply them to the various apocryphal writings now extant, giving also the very words of the books or fragments of books, and a translation of them in parallel columns, so as to enable every one to judge of the truth of his conclusions, and a full statement of the opinions of those who before him had occasion to mention them, both ancient and modern.

BEATRICE.

This appears a very fair way of treating the subject; pray what has been the result of it?

MR. B.

That the work has now for upwards of 100 years been regarded as decisive of the great question in favour of the New Testament as now received, against all other supposititious documents.

EDWARD.

Some of the propositions seem to me, however, to assume too much. If it were certain that the writings of the New Testament were really the productions of the persons whose names they

bear, we might argue from thence against other works which do not agree with them; but we do not know this to be the case.

MR. B.

We cannot, proceeding in the course we have taken, argue precisely in the manner Mr. Jones has done; but his propositions will bear examination, and his application of them be found conclusive. We may, however, even in some measure, make use of his arguments also; for though we cannot at present assert that these productions are not by the apostles of Christ, we can assert they are not by the authors of the New Testament; and if we hereafter prove that the books of the New Testament are genuine, *i. e.* really written by the persons whose names they bear, it will then follow, as a necessary consequence, that the other works of which we now speak are not.

BEATRICE.

So that the proof of their spuriousness depends upon the proof of the genuineness of the books of the New Testament.

MR. B.

Not necessarily; for some we may prove spurious without any reference to the books of the New Testament, both from external and internal

evidence. The Acts of Paul and Thecla, for instance, is known to be spurious “*from the confession and acknowledgment of the Asiatic presbyter who was the first author of them;*” and of others, by the 10th prop. of Jones, it may be shewn that they could not have been produced in the first century. It is, however, more in accordance with the course we are pursuing, to confine ourselves strictly to the question of the degree of authority attached to these books: for if it could be shewn that they ever had been recognised by the Christian church in this manner, the consequence would be most pernicious to Christianity; for we should then have to recognise a number of gross absurdities as integral parts of Christianity, in the supposition of the church having formed a right judgment on them; or must regard the testimony of the church inadequate to the establishing what books were genuine, and what were not. But if, on the other hand, it should appear, that the church never did acknowledge the authority of these records,—we have the strongest argument against the records themselves, and the most satisfactory proof of the care with which the canon was formed, and every reason to believe that the New Testament alone is the foundation of the Christian religion.

Now, from the labours of all who have searched into the remains of the first ages, it appears as

certain as any matter of historical fact can be, that whatever degree of credit might be attached to any other writings out of the New Testament, none but those in it were, in the strict sense of the word, canonical. The observations of Paley upon this subject give the real state of the case, and deserve attention.

“ I. That beside our Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, no Christian history, claiming to be written by an apostle or apostolical man, is quoted within three hundred years after the birth of Christ, by any writer now extant or known; or, if quoted, is not quoted without marks of censure and rejection.

“ II. But, besides certain *histories* which assumed the names of *apostles*, and which were *forgeries*, properly so called, there were some other Christian writings, in the whole or in part of an historical nature, which, though not forgeries, are denominated *apocryphal*, as being of uncertain or of no authority.

“ We may be permitted, however, to add —

“ 1. That there is no evidence that any spurious or apocryphal books whatever existed in the first century of the Christian era, in which century all our historical books are proved to have been extant. ‘ *There are no quotations of any such books in the apostolical fathers, by whom I mean Barnabas, Clement of Rome, Hermas, Ignatius, and Polycarp, whose writings reach from the year of our Lord 70, to the year 108,*’ (and some of whom have quoted each and every one of our historical Scriptures): ‘ *I say this,*’ adds Dr. Lardner, ‘ *because I think it has been proved.*’

“ 2. These apocryphal writings were not read in the churches of Christians;

“ 3. Were not admitted into their volume;

“ 4. Do not appear in their catalogues;

“ 5. Were not noticed by their adversaries ;

“ 6. Were not alleged by different parties as of authority, in their controversies ;

“ 7. Were not the subjects amongst them of commentaries, versions, collations, expositions.

“ Finally: besides the silence of three centuries, or evidence within that time of their rejection, they were, with a consent nearly universal, reprobated by Christian writers of succeeding ages.”—*Evidences*, Part I. Sect. I. ch. ix. sect. 11.

BEATRICE.

Admitting that these assertions are borne out by the quotations in the works you have referred to, I do not see how it is possible to place Christianity upon any other foundation than that of the New Testament alone; and, as its integrity has been already established, upon the examination of its contents the whole of the remainder of the argument seems to depend.

EDWARD.

Before we finally quit this part of the subject, permit me to ask a few questions, for I have always understood that the great strength of Christianity lay in the New Testament itself, and would therefore be the more careful not to pass too hastily to it. To whose writings, or to what kind of writings, was the canon of the church confined?

MR. B.

It appears to have been limited to the writings of

certain persons peculiarly chosen by the Founder of this religion to disseminate it, or to writings which received their sanction, or, in the language of the fathers, “the writings of the *apostles and of apostolical men.*”

EDWARD.

But is it certain that no other writings by these persons existed, except those which are contained in this volume?

MR. B.

On this subject there is a difference of opinion among the learned; some maintaining, for example, that St. Paul wrote more epistles than what are preserved in the New Testament; whilst others think that none of the writings of any of the apostles are lost.

BEATRICE.

Upon what grounds is this last opinion founded?

MR. B.

Partly upon the uncertainty that any more ever was written by them; but principally from the idea that, their writings being inspired, no part would be permitted to be lost.

EDWARD.

Such a reason as this, however, could never be given to an unbeliever, who is supposed, in the first instance, to have no regard to arguments of this nature; and might it not be supposed that

some documents actually have been suppressed, from the Christians of the succeeding age perceiving that they would injure rather than benefit their cause, or that they were opposed to their own wishes and views?

MR. B.

You have no evidence to support such an idea.

EDWARD.

But may it not be allowed, for argument's sake, for a moment? and if it may, is it not also conceivable, that from the suppressed documents, Christianity could actually have been proved to be founded in imposture?

MR. B.

That a religion originally false could, by the addition of some documents, or suppression of others, be made apparently true, is, in itself, one of the most unlikely things to happen that could possibly be conceived; for by whom would the change be made, and for what purpose? Suppose now, that Clement of Alexandria, in the course of his travels through Greece, had found some manuscripts by St. Paul; or that Origen, in passing through Palestine, had found some additional gospels, by which it was evident that the whole of the received canonical books were cunningly devised fables, founded upon some ob-

scure transactions in Judea, and owing all their success to the abilities of the writers, and a number of favourable contingent circumstances. Do you think that such men as Clement and Origen would have suppressed these important facts? that the former, who had been bred a Grecian philosopher, would have been disposed to acquiesce in the fraud which had deceived him, to embrace which he had renounced so much, and which he would be aware could offer nothing in return? or would Origen forget the martyrdom of his father, and pursue a course likely to lead himself to the same fate? Certainly no learned Jew or Gentile would ever, after such a discovery, have concealed it, and continued among the followers of the crucified Jesus, whom he knew could not be a Saviour, nor found hopes upon the narrative of a resurrection which he knew to be false.

EDWARD.

But might not a document of this kind have existed which would not so immediately lay Christianity open to exposure, but only by implication?

MR. B.

In that case, who would suppress that of which he did not perceive the tendency? The eagerness of the Christians to preserve memorials of the first planting of the Gospel and of the life of their Founder, would inevitably have induced any one,

who did not see of what use the document might be made against his faith, to publish it. The reverence paid by the Christians to the apostolic writings could hardly fail to produce its publication, and we know that the first Christians were by no means men of that character who would be likely to calculate before hand what objections might, in after ages, be drawn from the documents they handed down to posterity. When you are acquainted with the writings of the fathers, you will by no means suspect any of them of the ability to turn a false religion into one which should deceive the world for a succession of ages ; and you can hardly imagine such a train of chances, as that a religion, the falsity of which might originally be proved from its own documents, should yet have the singular good fortune to lose every particle by which its false pretensions could be exposed, and retain all best calculated to further its success. To all these chances you must also add the total silence of history, the silence of enemies, the silence of contending heresies, each eager to grasp at the shadow of apostolical authority for their errors, or at any thing by which they could discredit the received doctrines of the church.

EDWARD.

But is it so certain that the heretics were wrong, and the Catholic church right, as to the true doctrine of Christ ?

MR. B.

The probabilities are nearly equivalent to certainty; the great difference between the two, as far as we can ascertain, seemed to be, in that the church at large adhered steadily to the New Testament, where the others were making all sorts of experiments with the religion, uniting it to oriental fables, or to Jewish prejudices, or to Grecian philosophy, according to their several tastes, and straining the sacred books as far as they could to suit their purpose; and some, more daring than the rest, claiming new revelations, or cutting out those already made.

BEATRICE.

Then some of the heretics did not receive the books we receive?

MR. B.

Jones mentions some who rejected particular books, but it was on the supposition of their not being genuine; an objection which belongs to a future part of the subject. It is, however, well known, that they were very few in number; that they did so from evidently interested motives, and supported their assertions by most absurd reasons; so that their authority is of no weight.

BEATRICE.

The great reason for their being accounted canonical appears to have been their being es-

teemed genuine; and where the latter was doubtful, the former was uncertain.

MR. B.

Such undoubtedly was the case. The Epistle to the Hebrews had no name attached to it, as in the other Epistles of St. Paul, which occasioned the doubt respecting it. In the book of Revelations, the author does not call himself an apostle. In the Second and Third Epistles, he simply calls himself "the elder." Now these circumstances, though apparently trifling, might occasion some to doubt who did not live sufficiently near the places where these books were first published, and the doubt might be transmitted when the reason was forgotten, and thus an importance given to it which it originally had not. The conduct of the church at large in this matter clearly shews that the true ground of their being received as of authority, was their being believed to be written by persons possessed of authority, viz. the apostles; for wherever the latter was established, there was no longer any question as to their being canonical.

EDWARD.

But is it certain that the Greek text is altogether the original text, so that upon it Christianity may rest?

MR. B.

If it be not altogether the original text, it is

unquestionably the only authorised text. It is, indeed, asserted, by all those best able to know, that St. Matthew wrote in Hebrew, *i. e.* in the mixed dialect at that time made use of in Judea; and it is not improbable that St. Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews was originally written in Hebrew; but there is no question that, in both cases, the Greek text we now have was extant from the earliest time; and there can be hardly any doubt, that if not, in both cases, from the apostles' own hands, they were written under their direction. The original Gospel of St. Matthew, at an early period, must have become useless, on account of the state of Judea and the neighbouring countries; and it is not at all surprising, that it should be forgotten in the superior usefulness of the Greek for general purposes, even if it be not the case (as is supposed by many learned men), that having various additions made to it, by those who possessed copies, it became afterwards known under various names, as, "the Gospel according to the Twelve Apostles," "the Gospel according to the Hebrews;" till at length it lost its original character, and ceased to have authority as the original record.

EDWARD.

Has there not been some difference of opinion as to the genuineness of the two first chapters of St. Matthew's Gospel?

MR. B.

Objections have been made to them, but on very insufficient grounds, and I believe the question is now set at rest; none denying their genuineness, but from an unwillingness to acknowledge their contents, than which a more absurd mode of proceeding cannot be easily conceived: for if any part of the New Testament be such that it cannot be believed, the natural inference is against the whole, of which it forms an integral part; but if the principle once be admitted, that such parts are to be cut out, because they are contrary to our wishes, there is no end of reasoning upon the subject. Similar objections have been made to the first chapters of St. Luke; and various passages in other parts of the New Testament have been marked out in like manner, where the authority of manuscripts, versions, and quotations, is quite decisive. There is something in this mode of accommodating Christianity to the wishes of individuals, that is to me peculiarly disgusting. It is unworthy the cause of truth, and gives no great idea of the talents of him who makes use of it. Questions of this kind should ever be met fairly, as they really are. The canon of the New Testament, its integrity, its genuineness, and its credibility, should be investigated with as much acuteness and with as little reserve as in any other case, and the truth be held, at whatever cost. I am under no fear

that our religion will ever lose by the full investigation of the really learned; but the proof of the truth of Christianity would cease to be a proof to me, if, in order to attain it, I was under the necessity of rejecting that from the canon which had ever been admitted into it; of violating all the laws of criticism, to retain or to get rid of a particular text, or every fair rule of interpretation in order to make the Scriptures speak a language in agreement with opinions derived from other sources.

EDWARD.

Since we shall now have to refer to the New Testament itself, will it not become a matter of importance what text we make use of, and what interpretation of that text we adopt, in case of various readings, or a difference of opinion in the commentators?

MR. B.

For the text, there is not that great difference which is likely to affect our statements, nor yet as to the interpretation of that text; in matters of historical fact, with which we have principally to do, there being a pretty general agreement.

BEATRICE.

If you refer to the Greek text, and to interpretations of it, and to arguments drawn from thence, it will be impossible for me to understand you, my dear sir.

MR. B.

There must be reference occasionally to it ; but you will not have any great difficulty, I trust, in comprehending the nature of the arguments thence adduced, even if you do not see their whole force.

CONVERSATION IX.

BEATRICE.

WHAT is the precise meaning of the word *genuine*, as applied to the subject before us?

MR. B.

A book is *genuine* when written by the author whose name it bears; a book may, in some cases, be canonical where there is some degree of uncertainty as to the author; and a book may be *genuine* where it cannot be admitted as canonical. It has been a question, for instance, by whom the Epistle of St. James was written, some assigning it to the son of Zebedee and brother of St. John, and others to the bishop of Jerusalem, who is said to have been a near relation of our Lord. In either case the book would be canonical, as the production of an apostle, and a difference of opinion may safely be allowed in a matter where certainty cannot be obtained. Again, we have an Epistle to the Corinthians, by the Clement mentioned in St. Paul's Epistles, the genuineness of which appears fully established, but which, though very valuable as an ancient record, never was held *canonical*, not being the production of one of those immediately designated by the Founder of the religion as its authorised teachers and governors.

EDWARD.

But with regard to the books of the New Testament, it is asserted that they are canonical because they are genuine. The proof, however, of the former does not to us necessarily demonstrate the latter.

MR. B.

It does not ; for the first Christians might possibly have been mistaken in believing them genuine, and therefore have erred in constituting them canonical : but since they were unquestionably the best judges in every thing relative to these books, their decision ought to be sufficient proof to us, in case no *positive proof* can be established against the genuineness of these writings ; and this we can only obtain from the internal evidence derived from an examination of the books themselves, there being no external evidence against it.

BEATRICE.

Do none of the ancient adversaries controvert the genuineness of these writings ?

MR. B.

Not one ; and their conduct in this respect proves that they could not overthrow it.

BEATRICE.

How so ?

MR. B.

Because it would have afforded the readiest way of overthrowing the whole : it is evident that they were grievously embarrassed by the statements of the New Testament; and had any grounds for it existed, a sufficient length of time elapsed to have presented this method of attack to them : but Julian admits the fact of their genuineness as undeniable, and argues from thence; he speaks of the greater number of the writers of the New Testament by name; and indeed his attack upon Christianity is to us invaluable, as from the learning, the talents, and the rancorous hatred to Christianity of this opponent, we are certain that he would never have regarded these records as genuine, had there been the least ground for opposition. Porphyry, in like manner, at an earlier period, mentions, in the few fragments which yet remain, the Gospels of St. Matthew, St. Mark, and St. John, the Acts of the Apostles, and the Epistle to the Galatians; and from his conduct we may draw a similar inference.

BEATRICE.

This is certainly very much in their favour; but did Celsus do the same?

MR. B.

Celsus does not quote by name; and therefore only establishes the existence of the words of the

New Testament at the period in which he wrote. Now consider, in addition to this, the vast force of the argument derived from these books having been constituted canonical because believed to be genuine, towards establishing the fact of their genuineness. Admitting that possibly the adversaries of Christianity had not the means of proving them spurious, had any means of so doing existed, the Christians could not have been destitute of those means.

BEATRICE.

But they had no wish to prove them spurious, and therefore if the means were in their hands they would not use it, perhaps not perceive it.

MR. B.

But why should they wish to prove these records genuine, had they never existed? I know not how the Christian assertions, as to their religion and its Founder, could have been *disproved*; Christianity did not so necessarily depend upon these documents that it must have fallen with them. They were, most probably, disposed to wish Christianity true; and if, indeed, they continued in the church, they must have been aware, that if it were not true, they were of all men the most miserable. They also had in their hands these records, but it does not follow that they should feel an equal zeal to prove these true; for the great stimulus in those times was the hope of a joyful

resurrection, and the great foundation of it was the fact of the resurrection of the Founder of their religion. Now this hope, though it would have been weakened, and this fact rendered more uncertain, by the want of genuineness in these writings, yet would not have been so entirely done away as to be put into competition with what to numbers must have been the greatest trial, viz. *the pure and holy life inculcated in these writings*; which is so contrary to what we know to have been the general practice of the world, that it seems wholly incredible that men should have tied themselves down to its observance without the fullest conviction that the authority which commanded it was paramount

BEATRICE.

And that authority evidently depended on the genuineness of these writings, which therefore they would not have acknowledged but upon conviction.

MR. B.

You must ever bear this in mind, that the New Testament was not to them a *mere* record of facts and opinions, which some might believe, and others not; it was, indeed, a record of facts, but of facts to which they were to be ready to bear witness with their blood; a record of precepts, on the observance of which depended all their hopes of salvation. So long as the New Testament existed, and the persecutions of the church continued, (and

who could hope that if the former was promulgated the latter would cease?) the Christian was tied down to a line of conduct such as the world had known no instance of before: "to resist not evil;" "to do good unto them that hate you, and pray for those that despitefully use you and persecute you;" "to return good for evil;" "to be ready to lay down their lives for the brethren,"—were precepts, when connected with *religious authority*, such as the world had never seen before. Some philosopher might have approximated to one, and some patriot occasionally exemplified another; but to make precepts like these universally binding had never entered into the imagination of any one before the promulgation of Christianity, and it is impossible that they would have been allowed as such upon any but the greatest authority.

BEATRICE.

And all the authority rested upon these books, so that if they could have proved these spurious, they might have retained what they liked, and discarded the rest.

MR. B.

Again, there is a sobriety in Christianity as delivered in the New Testament, amidst all its high claims, which must have been a grievous restraint on any other supposition than that of its truth; the yoke of Christ would then be easy, and his burden light: but if any doubt had attached to the

genuineness of these writings, I think the Christian world would never have been kept so long in subjection by them, when the common passions of mankind must have strongly prompted a different line of conduct. You may see in Gibbon how intimately Paganism was interwoven with the constitution of civil society, how much it affected every walk of life ; you may see, by the conduct of the more virtuous emperors, in what a strange situation the world was placed by the pretensions of Christianity ; and then you may form some estimate of the degree of assurance which the Christian must have possessed, to induce him to persevere in a course which compelled him to go so far, and permitted him to go no farther ; which commanded him to “live soberly, righteously, and godly ;” “to seek peace, and ensue it ;” “in all simplicity and godly sincerity to have his conversation in the world ;” “to do good unto all men, especially them that were of the household of faith ;” and yet forbade the least approaches to the sinful habits and practices of those by whom he was surrounded ; and compelled him to become, in the eyes of others, “a fool, that he might win Christ ;” to account it “all joy when he fell into affliction ;” and in all respects to act on principles which even the wise and good among the heathen could not understand, and which the most merciful princes hardly could tolerate.

EDWARD.

Had the New Testament allowed the Christians to propagate their religion by the readiest means which presented, or to compound for the loss of some pleasures by indulgence in others, we could not have wondered at their not too narrowly investigating its genuineness; but its severe restrictions, and claims to entire obedience in a line of conduct which must render them obnoxious to others, would certainly, one would think, render them cautious in admitting its authority.

MR. B.

But, beyond all this, we know that there was a tendency in the Christians to go beyond the letter of the New Testament in some things, and fall short of it in others : their own practice is a sufficient proof that there was a *necessity* of admitting the genuineness of these books which could not be overcome. The conduct of heretics proves the same. The steady light of the Gospel was ever fatal to the phantoms of darkness, which were forced to retire into an obscurity alone able to give them some resemblance of reality.

EDWARD.

How did those heretics act who disputed the genuineness of the New Testament ?

MR. B.

The most important of these objectors were the Manichæans, of whom

“Faustus pre-supposes the New Testament to contain a variety of true accounts relating to the actions and doctrines of Christ and his apostles; but that the several books are not merely interpolated (in which case the question would belong to another part of this work), but composed by certain unknown persons, who, living in a much later period than those to whom these writings are ascribed, have confounded in their narratives truth with falsehood.” — *MICHAELIS*, vol. i. p. 18.

EDWARD.

What answer is given to this supposition?

MR. B.

Michaelis replies :

1. It is not certain that all Manichæans thought like Faustus.

2. Even if Manes, their founder, thus thought, yet he only lived in the middle of the third century; he was a stranger, and totally unqualified, from ignorance of Greek, to form an adequate judgment.

3. Faustus, who lived 130 years later, was equally unqualified to investigate the subject, being illiterate in the highest degree.

4. His arguments are *not built on historical ground*, but on principles which have nothing to do with the subject.

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5. It was the practice of the sect to reject all principles which did not correspond with their philosophy : and, lastly,

The answer which Augustin gave at the time—

“ For the same reasons for which the writings of Hippocrates and other Greek or Roman authors are maintained to be genuine, we conclude the books of the New Testament to have been written by the persons to whom they are ascribed.”

EDWARD.

These reasons are very satisfactory. Have there been any similar attempts to disprove the genuineness of the New Testament?

MR. B.

You will find in Michaelis an account of a singular supposition against it, which was advanced by an Italian, in a letter to Le Clerc, and which Le Clerc confuted, though too absurd to deserve it. I would recommend you carefully to read the whole of the admirable chapter on the Authenticity of the New Testament, in Michaelis, with reference to the notes of Bishop Marsh. Of this chapter the translator observes,

“ In the chapter which relates to the authenticity of the New Testament, the evidence both external and internal is arranged in so clear and intelligible a manner, as to afford conviction even to those who have never engaged in theological inquiries : and the experienced critic will find the subject discussed in so full and comprehensive a manner, that he will probably pronounce it the most complete essay on the authenticity of the New Testament that ever was published.” — *Pref.* p. iii.

BEATRICE.

What is the meaning of the word authenticity? is it the same as genuine?

MR. B.

You must take Bishop Marsh's definition, as it is to him I refer.

"Some writers use the term authentic in so extensive a sense, as to make it include both the question of authorship, and the question of fidelity and truth. In this acceptation of the term, a book, though genuine, if written by the person to whom it is ascribed, is not authentic, unless the accounts which it contains are worthy of credit.

"Instead of employing the terms *genuineness* and *authenticity*, I employ the terms *authenticity* and *credibility*; the former to denote that a book was written by the author to whom it is ascribed, the latter to denote that the contents of the book are justly entitled to our assent." — *Lcct.* Part V. pp. 3, 4.

BEATRICE.

It is then used in a sense corresponding to that of genuine. But what is the method pursued by Michaelis in this proof?

MR. B.

It is divided into twelve sections, as follows :

§ 1. Importance of this inquiry, and its influence on the question of the Divine origin of the Christian religion.

§ 2. Of objections made to these writings in general, and of those of Faustus the Manichæan in particular.

§ 3. The New Testament is proved to be genuine on the same grounds as the works of profane authors.

§ 4. Positive grounds for the authenticity of the New Testament.

§ 5. Impossibility of a forgery, arising from the nature of the thing itself.

§ 6. Testimonies of the fathers and other Christian writers of the first centuries.

§ 7. Testimonies of the heretics of the first centuries.

§ 8. Jewish and heathen testimonies for the authenticity of the New Testament.

§ 9. Ancient versions.

§ 10. Internal evidence; and, first, that derived from the style of the New Testament.

§ 11. Coincidence of the accounts delivered in the New Testament with the history of those times.

§ 12. Objections drawn from real or apparent contradictions between the accounts of profane authors and those of the New Testament, particularly those of St. Luke.

EDWARD.

Several of these particulars would appear to affect the “credibility” as well as the “authenticity” of the New Testament.

MR. B.

They do in the same manner that the testi-

monies for the canonical authority of the New Testament equally affect its genuineness.

EDWARD.

Bishop Marsh has also written upon the same subject.

MR. B.

It is arranged under the third branch of his Lectures, and constitutes the fifth part in those already published, which you should make a point of reading, if any circumstances prevent your reading the work of Michaelis.

BEATRICE.

Does he pursue a similar method?

MR. B.

He arranges the proofs of the authenticity under the general heads of external and internal evidence. In the first he begins with the end of the fourth century, and ascends from thence to the age which was next to that of the apostles, producing in order the testimonies of Jerome, Gregory of Nazianzum, Epiphanius, Athanasius, Eusebius, Origen, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, and Irenæus. He then again takes up the subject from the statement of Eusebius, and argues from the facts of the case with regard to the books which had been universally received, and those which had only partially been acknowledged, and confirms the authenticity of each by arguments

applying specially to them. Lastly, he connects the results so obtained with the testimony of the apostolic fathers, and thus establishes his proof from external evidence.

With regard to the internal evidence, he shews, first, its agreement and confirmation of the external evidence; then, advancing further, he proves, that in this particular it establishes the genuineness of the writings *independently* of external evidence, because *the books could not have been written by any person who was not contemporary with the events described*, which, with other important matter, is developed with singular felicity and address. Lastly, from connecting the conclusions thus obtained with that proof already given by external aid, he deduces the important fact, “that the books of the New Testament must be the productions of the persons whose names they bear.”

BEATRICE.

Will you give us some illustrations of the method of proof made use of in these works?

MR. B.

As you must be aware, that our time does not allow of many, I shall pass over the external testimony (strong as it is), since it would be only a repetition of quotations from the works of the fathers, and endeavour to give you, in preference, some idea of the force of the internal evidence.

EDWARD.

But no internal evidence, I should think, could prove the genuineness of any works in any case; and in this we know nothing of the authors but from their own account.

MR. B.

We know, perhaps, as much of these authors, from the accounts of others, as we do of many writers, of the genuineness of whose works we entertain no doubt; but you must remember that the external evidence, as far as it goes, is *altogether in favour of the genuineness of these records*. Of that there is no question: it only remains to examine whether the internal evidence is such as to prove the external evidence false. Now we not only assert that it confirms the external evidence, but that it goes so far beyond it, that, had we had no external evidence at all, the internal evidence alone would have afforded the strongest grounds of presumption for the genuineness of these books.

First, then, with regard to the general appearance of the New Testament, every thing corroborates the Christian statement as to its origin, and nothing can be found to militate against it; an argument of such great weight, that it approaches very nearly to impossibility for such an agreement to subsist in a work of this nature, in the case of deception.

BEATRICE.

I do not see why.

MR. B.

The New Testament is supposed to have been written by eight different authors, and consists of twenty-seven different books, treating on a great number of the most important subjects, and involving such an immense number of facts and arguments, with so many modifications and combinations of them, that it seems wholly incredible that (on the supposition of their being spurious) no *positive* proof against them should be deducible from them. Now, these books have been more carefully examined, more canvassed, and more disputed upon, than any others which were ever produced; and yet all the attention which has yet been bestowed upon them has been unequal to detect one passage sufficient to overthrow their genuineness.

BEATRICE.

This is certainly much in their favour, when the length of time (seventeen hundred years), and the various dispositions of those who have written upon the subject, are considered.

MR. B.

But to descend to particulars; the language is precisely such as it ought to be, in the supposition of its being genuine.

BEATRICE.

Might not this equally be the case if spurious?

MR. B.

No: the language fixes almost to a certainty both the country and the time of the authors.

BEATRICE.

In what manner? It is only Greek, and they were Jews.

MR. B.

But it is a peculiar kind of Greek, such as Jews only could write; such as could only be written by Jews for a very limited period.

“The first and principal of the internal marks of authenticity is the language of the New Testament, which is written in a style that must be striking, not only to every man accustomed to the Greek of the classic authors, but even to those who are acquainted only with the writings of the fathers. It is principally distinguished by the Hebraisms and Syriasms with which these writings abound; a circumstance too often considered as a fault, which pious ignorance, even so late as the present century, has attempted to wipe away; not knowing that these very deviations from Grecian purity afford the strongest presumption in its favour. *They shew it to have been written by men of Hebrew origin, a production therefore of the first century; since, after the decease of Jewish converts to Christianity, we find hardly any instance of Jews who turned preachers of the Gospel; and the Christian fathers were, for the most part, totally ignorant of Hebrew.*”—MICHAELIS, vol. i. p. 45.

EDWARD.

But might not this be an artful imitation, the effect of design ?

MR. B.

We are not aware of the existence of any one able to have produced a spurious work couched in such language ; and there is not the least appearance of design.

“ Nor have these idioms the appearance of art and design, being exactly such as might be expected from persons who used a language, spoken indeed where they lived, but not the dialect of their country. And if the New Testament were a forgery of the second or third century, its author, the better to disguise his imposture, must have studied to imitate the style of writing which might have been expected from the apostles ; a supposition totally incredible ; for the lower order of Christians were too deficient in criticism to perceive these various shades, and possessed too little taste to execute the undertaking with success ; while the learned fathers of the second and two following centuries exercised their talents in searching into the authenticity of the writings already received : and had the fathers of those ages been inclined to impose, they were mostly devoid of the means, since those who were ignorant of Hebrew and Syriac would hardly introduce Hebraisms and Syriasms into their writings. The Nazarenes, on the contrary, who understood Hebrew, accepted only the Gospel of St. Matthew, and must therefore remain innocent of the charge of having forged the rest of the sacred writings. The difficulty of imitating the Oriental style is felt only by those who are conversant with the eastern writers ; and the modern novels, written even by men of taste and genius, under the title of ‘ Oriental Tales,’ are as distant from the Asiatic mode of writing as they

differ from the European. And yet if the New Testament be a forgery, the Christians of the second and third century must be supposed capable of an imitation, which cannot be distinguished from an original. On the contrary, the language of the early fathers, though not always the purest classic Greek, has no resemblance to that of the New Testament, not excepting the works of the few who had a knowledge of the Hebrew, Origenes Epiphanius, or Justin Martyr, from whom, as a native of Palestine, it might, with some reason, be expected."

BEATRICE.

To what time does the language of the books of the New Testament appear to limit the date of its composition?

MR. B.

The opinion of Michaelis is, that they must have been written before the year 120.

EDWARD.

But this only proves in general that their origin must have been before that date, and that they were of Jewish extraction. It does not establish their being independent authors.

MR. B.

No: for this we must examine the style of each.

" But similar as these writings are to each other in Oriental idioms, they are equally distinct and characteristic in the particular style of their respective authors. They cannot, then, have proceeded from the hands of a single impostor; and the supposition of their being an accidental collection of spurious writings from different authors is attended nearly with the

same difficulties as the former hypothesis. Whoever reads with attention the thirteen epistles of St. Paul (for at present I do not include the Epistle to the Hebrews), must be convinced that they were all written by the same author, who has so many distinguishing marks, that he is not easy to be mistaken. On all these thirteen epistles is impressed the character of a man well versed in the Greek language, and possessed of general erudition, who could use the finest and even the severest irony, without rejecting the rules of decency; but who, in consequence of his Jewish original, and his indifference with respect to style, abounded in Hebraisms and Syriasms, and sometimes borrowed from the place of his birth even the provincial expressions of Cilicia. An equal degree of similarity is to be found between the Gospel and Epistle of St. John; and the only compositions of the same author which, notwithstanding their general resemblance, betray a difference of style, are the Gospel of St. Luke and the Acts of the Apostles; his Gospel abounding with harsh and uncouth Hebraisms; while the Acts of the Apostles, though not free from Hebraisms, are written in a language that approaches nearer to purity and classical correctness. The reason of this difference will be explained at large in the Second Part."

BEATRICE.

If I understand the argument right, it would have been as impossible for any one to have produced writings of this nature, in a dialect which was, when spoken, confined to a particular district, after that dialect had become extinct, as for a person now to write in the old Norman French of the middle ages eight sets of chronicles, containing all sorts of allusions to things which had become obsolete, and preserving different

styles for each set, as well as an obsolete dialect for the whole.

MR. B.

And in addition to this, you must now take into account the difference of disposition, and the general character of mind developed in these documents, only to be accounted for by the supposition of their being genuine.

“The writings of St. John and St. Paul discover marks of an original genius, that no imitation can ever attain, which always betrays itself by the very labour excited to cover the deception; and if we consider attentively the various qualities that compose the extraordinary character of the latter apostle, we shall find it to be such as no art could ever imitate. His mind overflows with sentiment, yet he never loses sight of his principal object, but, hurried on by the rapidity of thought, discloses frequently in the middle a conclusion to be made only at the end. To a profound knowledge of the Old Testament he joins the acuteness of philosophical wisdom, which he displays in applying and expounding the sacred writings; and his explanations are therefore sometimes so new and unexpected, that superficial observers might be tempted to suppose them erroneous. The fire of his genius and his inattention to style occasion frequently a two-fold obscurity; he being often too concise to be understood, except by those to whom he immediately wrote; and not seldom, on the other hand, so full of his subject, as to produce long and difficult parentheses, and a repetition of the same word, even in different senses. With a talent for irony and satire, he unites the most refined sensibility, and tempers the severity of his censures by expressions of tenderness and affection; nor does he ever forget, in the vehemence of his zeal, the rules of modesty and decorum. He is a writer, in short, of so singular a composition, that it would be difficult

to find a rival. That truly sensible and sagacious philosopher, Locke, was of the same opinion, and contended that St. Paul was without an equal."

From these quotations you may judge of the strength of this argument for the genuineness of the books of the New Testament, and of the able and interesting manner in which it is developed by Michaelis.

BEATRICE.

It is very true : in reading St. Paul's Epistles, I could not think them otherwise than his own real letters, if I were to try to do so.

MR. B.

And it is equally difficult to imagine the Gospels written by any others than eye-witnesses of what they related, or by those who put down what eye-witnesses related to them. Those who read the New Testament much cannot be infidels, unless the mind be altogether vitiated. But when do unbelievers ever give it a fair chance ?

EDWARD.

You have not yet brought forward any argument from the general agreement of the New Testament with other writers.

MR. B.

I could not thence immediately infer the genuineness of the books, since an impostor might take

care not to deviate from facts already known ; but from *undesigned agreement* of these different portions of their writings with each other, and with known history, an argument irresistibly strong may be drawn in their favour.

BEATRICE.

What is meant by *undesigned agreement* ?

MR. B.

If agreement subsists between two documents, it must be either the effect of design or not. If the agreement be evident, it is not improbably the effect of design ; and we may have some reason, where additional suspicious circumstances are connected with it, to infer the probability of forgery ; but no person attempting to palm spurious documents upon the world as genuine, would omit to make evident, in some degree, an agreement which would contribute to their reputation, since it would be useless making a coincidence of this nature unless it were apparent. But in the New Testament we have instances of coincidence and agreement which are by no means evident, and in fact so far from it, that the agreement is only ascertained after considerable research : in some cases even there has appeared, for a long time, contradiction, instead of agreement. Now this could not possibly occur if these books were otherwise than genuine ; for no forger would leave difficulties

likely to overthrow the credit of his forgery ; no forger would fail to make the fact observable which gave credit to his statements.

BEATRICE.

And can many instances of undesigned coincidence be produced ?

MR. B.

You will find some most convincing examples in Marsh's Lectures, and in the Translation of Michaelis, taken from the Gospels and the Acts ; and Dr. Paley composed a book, entitled *Horæ Paulinæ*, entirely on this subject, in which, by comparing the life of St. Paul given in the Acts of the Apostles with his epistles, he proves that both must have been genuine, and independent of each other, neither the epistles having been compiled from the life, nor the life from the epistles. This work of Paley's is also peculiarly valuable, inasmuch as the argument is quite independent of all others, assuming merely the existence of the books at the present time.

BEATRICE.

Will you give some examples of this kind of agreement ?

MR. B.

From the very nature of it, the development of this kind of proof would occupy more time than

we can give to it; but the following may give you some idea of it:

In the third chapter of St. Luke's Gospel, John the Baptist is mentioned as giving advice to those who came to him for baptism, and, amongst others, to soldiers, when the Greek word is not that ordinarily employed, but one denoting soldiers then engaged in actual service; and for this no reason can be assigned from St. Luke.

Again, in the sixth chapter of St. Mark's Gospel we have an account of the death of John the Baptist, and what renders the circumstance singular is, that the order was given by Herod, at an entertainment at which Herodias, with her daughter, was present, and the executioner was not in a civil but a *military* capacity; but no further light is thrown upon this peculiarity of expression.

In the fifth chapter of the eighteenth book of the Jewish Antiquities of Josephus we however meet with the reason; for we thence learn, that Herod then marched through the very country where John was baptising, which explains the peculiarity of St. Luke's expression; and of that war Herodias was the cause, which accounts for her presence at the entertainment, and this also was given at the place where Herod shut up John in prison, Machærus, a fortress on the eastern side of Jordan, and hence it naturally followed that the executioner was such as described by St. Mark.

Now if these gospels had not been genuine documents, it is the most improbable thing in the world that the authors of them should have been so scrupulously accurate as to use precisely the right expressions; but if they had done so, it is wholly inconceivable that they would leave them unexplained, with an appearance of inaccuracy, when by a further statement they might have so strongly recommended the correctness of their accounts.

BEATRICE.

And but for the help of Josephus it could never have been explained.

MR. B.

You will find the other instances not less interesting. I shall now give you Paley's observations upon the proof derived from the comparison of the Acts of the Apostles with the epistles.

“ St. Paul's epistles are connected with the history by their particularity, and by the numerous circumstances which are found in them. When we descend to an examination and comparison of these circumstances, we not only observe the history and the epistles to be independent documents unknown to, or at least unconsulted by, each other, but we find the substance, and oftentimes very minute articles of the history recognised in the epistles by allusions and references, which can neither be imputed to *design*, nor, without a foundation of truth, be accounted for by accident, *by hints and expressions and single words, dropping, as it were, fortuitously from the pen of the writer, or drawn forth each by some occasion proper to the place in which it occurs, but widely removed from any view to*

consistency or agreement. These we know are effects which reality naturally produces, but which, without reality at the bottom, can hardly be conceived to exist."—*Hor. Paul.* p. 355.

EDWARD.

So that it is in the total absence of all appearance of design, and the minute agreement only detected by diligent examination, that the real strength of the argument consists?

MR. B.

It is: and you will find the conviction produced by examination of this kind so strong, that no sophistry on the part of infidelity can shake it. But there is yet another argument which must be produced, and which seems as decidedly to exclude the possibility of imposition in the external evidence as this does in the internal. With regard to the books of the New Testament, some books were *universally* received, no doubt having ever attached to them.

"These books were, the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, thirteen Epistles of St. Paul, the First Epistle of St. Peter, and the First Epistle of St. John. That all these books had been universally received, is a fact attested by Eusebius, and confirmed by the writers who preceded him. Now, if the historical books of the New Testament were universally received, they must have been received as authentic in the very places where they were composed, and by the persons to whom they were first delivered. And whatever apostolic epistles were universally received, they must have been received as authentic by the very persons or communities to whom they were immediately addressed." — *MARSH's Lect.* part v. p. 47.

But this reduces the whole almost to a matter of demonstration in favour of their genuineness, as Bishop Marsh proceeds to shew by examining each case in detail ; for it is next to impossible that the Christian communities at Rome, Corinth, in Galatia, at Ephesus, Philippi, Colosse, and Thessalonica, could be imposed upon. These epistles are abundantly quoted in the middle of the second century, and partially so in the works assigned to the apostolic fathers at its commencement. They were, therefore, no secret, and a considerable time must have elapsed ere they could have spread so widely ; and that, within so very short a time of the death of St. Paul as this brings us to, specious documents should impose upon *all the Christians*, without any exception, that every one of these cities should be deceived, is wholly incredible. Some trace of doubt must have remained in case of imposture. And now take the whole cumulative weight in favour of the genuineness of these documents together ; consider the circumstances under which they are transmitted to us ; the deep interest the Christians had at stake ; their sincerity, proved in death ; their means of ascertaining the truth ; the care they took in so doing ; their full testimony ; the very nature of the documents as *Christian Laws* demanding obedience ; the high reverence paid them as inspired ; and that they received that obedience and reverence in places also where imposture could most easily have been detected ;—

consider again, the language of these writings; the peculiar style of each author; the character of the author as manifested from them; their agreement with fact, and with each other; their having never yet been proved spurious, notwithstanding the extent of subject they embrace; the persons who have studied them, and the time which has elapsed, and their undesigned coincidence;—and you must conclude they are the productions of those whose names they bear.

CONVERSATION X.

MR. B.

As the greatest stress will be laid upon the genuineness of the books of the New Testament, if you have any objection to make to the conclusion drawn in our last conversation, you must state it now.

BEATRICE.

I cannot see how that conclusion can be evaded.

EDWARD.

Nor I; unless it be on the grounds that we have no account of these authors by contemporaries.

MR. B.

I might have recourse to the works of the apostolic fathers to answer this objection; but as some doubt is attached to the genuineness of the writings ascribed to them, I shall not. On what grounds, however, do you believe that such men as Cæsar and Cicero lived, and wrote the books commonly ascribed to them?

EDWARD.

There are accounts of them by contemporary writers, and their works have been transmitted to us as genuine by those who must have been able to decide. The testimony of Sallust alone would be sufficient to establish the fact.

MR. B.

But how would you establish the existence of Sallust, and the genuineness of the works ascribed to him?

EDWARD.

By similar means.

MR. B.

Then are you not placed in the same situation with regard to Cicerò, Cæsar, and Sallust, as we are with regard to the writers of the New Testament?

EDWARD.

Not exactly; for the books of the New Testament all form one system of religion, the parts of which might naturally be expected to support each other.

MR. B.

But would not the same argument have applied to the Roman authors just mentioned, had it become expedient to unite their works in a similar manner? The New Testament is now regarded as one work; but you must always bear in mind, that it is, in fact, a collection of the works of eight authors, and that these writings are asserted to have been produced in different countries, with different objects; and that it was only the immense weight attached to their authority which occasioned their being collected and separated so decisively from all other works as we now see them.

EDWARD.

But is it not assuming too much that they certainly are the works of *different* authors?

MR. B.

Would you believe that Sallust wrote the various works of Cicero and the Commentaries of Cæsar?

EDWARD.

Certainly not: it is impossible.

MR. B.

Not more impossible than that St. John should have written the narratives of St. Luke, St. Matthew, and St. Mark, the Epistles of St. Peter, St. Paul, St. James, and St. Jude. If the unanimous testimony of all subsequent writers establish the facts in the one case, so they do in the other; if the internal evidence makes the idea of forgery absurd in the one case, so it does in the other.

EDWARD.

But Cicero is an author *sui generis*; no one but Cicero could have written the works ascribed to him.

MR. B.

And so is St. Paul an author *sui generis*; and the impossibility attached to the forgery of works ascribed to him is as evident as that in a similar supposition with regard to the works of Cicero.

BEATRICE.

In both cases, it appears we know nothing of the authors but by the belief of those who lived subsequently to them, and through the examination of the accounts of those said to be contemporaries, and of the works said to be theirs.

EDWARD.

But the Roman orator acted so distinguished a part, that no doubt can attach to him.

MR. B.

And did Paul of Tarsus do less? According to the most favourable hypothesis that can be framed for you, all the natural advantages were on the side of Cicero. But look at the results. The Jew holds the world in subjection; the greatest admirers of the Roman are compelled to acknowledge his insufficiency. St. Paul's works *cannot be overthrown*; those of Cicero, with all their learning, all their genius, all their charms of style, can hardly be made even plausible, as respects religion. And can you believe that writings which have produced such effects are *mere fictions*? Is it credible, that what Porphyry and Julian could not shake is reserved for our days to overthrow; when, according to the principles of those who wish to invalidate the arguments for the genuineness of the Scriptures, the interval of time which has elapsed since

their promulgation is the great obstacle to ascertaining the truth?

EDWARD.

But all the evidence in behalf of the genuineness of these works nearest the time of their publication, is to be found in the writings of those who were bound to support them.

MR. B.

Whence could the evidence arise, if not from thence? Are a man's friends, or his enemies, those to whom he chiefly writes? By whom can the fact of a letter's having been written be established, but by those to whom it is addressed, and are best acquainted with the writer? What fuller proof can be given of their belief in its genuineness, than obedience to its injunctions, at the risk of loss of property, liberty, and even *life* itself; when those injunctions also are of a nature contrary to former habits, opinions, and inclinations?

BEATRICE.

The evidence indeed, as derived from the reception of St. Paul's letters in the cities to which they are addressed, is to me irresistible; for I can never believe they could have been received there as of divine authority, had it not been a certain fact, that they had really been sent by St. Paul, and known to be his, by those in whose hands they

first appeared. The time also is too limited for deception to have been practised.

MR. B.

Tertullian made use of this very argument, and insists upon the fact of the "*authentic letters*" existing in these cities, which, whatsoever meaning be attached to the words, must imply the fact of there being no doubt in those cities. In the epistles ascribed to the apostolic fathers, addressed to the cities themselves, we have also reference to this fact, which reference could never have been made by any author if that had not been the case.

EDWARD.

With regard to the Epistles of St. Paul and the Acts of the Apostles, it does not appear possible certainly to have any doubt as to their genuineness; but with regard to the Gospels, I should like to have had more information.

MR. B.

But if the "Acts of the Apostles" be genuine, the Gospel of St. Luke, of which it is only a continuation, must be so likewise; and from the works of St. Luke and St. Paul we obtain sufficient information by which to try the genuineness of the other authors. We learn from St. Paul, that Peter and James and John were pillars of the church; from St. Luke, the character of St. Matthew; and

from both, that of St. Mark. Besides this, we have the authority of those who best knew the truth for saying that the Gospel of St. Mark was derived from the statements of St. Peter, as that of St. Luke was sanctioned by St. Paul. Those of St. Matthew and St. John stand upon their own independent authority. But the agreement between the various writings ascribed to St. John fully confirms the fact of their having proceeded from the same author: and when we consider that not the shadow of doubt ever existed as to the Gospel and the First Epistle; and that Irenæus, who derived his information from Polycarp, the *disciple of St. John*, expressly assigns to him the Apocalypse; and that the two short epistles, being private, could not be expected to be universally received at once, but yet when known were received; you cannot doubt of the genuineness of the books ascribed to this apostle.

BEATRICE.

He also lived longer than the rest, so that the less chance remained for imposition.

MR. B.

That St. John lived to the end of the first century has been so long acknowledged, that he must be sceptical indeed who would now call it in question; and the works ascribed to him (particularly the Gospel, which is, in our inquiry, of the greatest

importance) contain such abundant internal evidence of genuineness, in addition to external testimony, that there seems no evading the conclusion, that they were written by the "beloved disciple."

EDWARD.

But may we not suppose that the Gospel of St. Matthew was written by some other person about the time, and circumstances generally known and assigned to him, in order to give it authority?

MR. B.

The Hebrew Gospel of St. Matthew is supposed to have been written in the year 37; and the Greek translation, which we now have, probably appeared about the year 63. Now if the Gospel of St. Matthew was not written by the apostle, it must either have been done by one believing the events to have occurred, and, through earnest desire to advance the belief of them, induced to do that in itself wrong for the sake of advancing what he believed to be a great good; or by one who disbelieved the facts, but was desirous, by means of them, to establish his own opinions. Now, in either case, the author would be most anxious to finish his production to the utmost degree, in order that the deception might not be discovered, and, at the same time, be very careful where he first produced it.

EDWARD.

As far as possible, he would put it out of the power of any one to expose the weakness of its claims or the falsity of its contents.

MR. B.

Yet this Gospel unquestionably first appeared in the country where the supposed author was best known, and where the events related had occurred, and at a time when the assigned author, if not alive, could only have been dead a very short time. Would a person capable of such a forgery have been so imprudent, and, when so little scrupulous about the means of promulgating his opinions, so careless in his choice of means? But in what manner would a forger of such a document write, as respected common prejudices and opinions?

BEATRICE.

Very carefully, of course; since otherwise he would excite many enemies, at a time when any one enemy would be of serious consequence.

MR. B.

Yet look at the Gospel itself. Can any thing be more bold or decisive? If not genuine, what inducement could there be needlessly to irritate so many powerful parties in Judea, by the strong language put into the mouth of our Lord? There

is no quarter given to the follies, the vices, and the prejudices of those of his own nation; no leaning towards any party; no attempt to make any set of men (able to defend him) his friends; no attempt to interest national pride in his defence. He speaks as one having authority, as calling for investigation.

BEATRICE.

There must have been motives to attempt detection, as well as means of so doing, in case of forgery.

MR. B.

There must; yet there is no fear of consequences, no careful guarding of his statements, by throwing them into the obscurity of distance of time, or remoteness of situation. There is no endeavour at plausibility, the narrative being given in all the hardihood, all the carelessness commonly accompanying truth; with parts apparently objectionable, unexplained allusions, and every portion bearing the strongest marks of original authorship.

EDWARD.

It is indeed like any thing rather than the careful compiling and studied arrangement of an impostor.

MR. B.

If we had only this one narrative, we could not account for its production on any other supposition than that it was written by a Jew who lived

before the destruction of Jerusalem, who was a firm believer in the divine mission of Jesus of Nazareth, and thought it his duty to declare (let the consequences be what they might) the things which he had seen and heard. It is so completely Jewish in language, style, and thought, the author is so wholly absorbed in the things which he is relating, and the whole turn and character of the work is such, that none but a Jew *could* have written it; and yet there are parts of it so contrary to Judaism, that no Jew ever *would* have written it, but an apostle of Christ. From St. Paul's Epistles and the Acts we see the great difficulty there was to get over Jewish prejudices; and from the works of the Jews themselves we know these prejudices are not over-rated by the sacred writers. Nothing short of the genuineness of the Gospel can account for its contents; it is so totally at variance with all the wishes, habits of thinking, and prejudices of the Jews. None but an apostle would ever have entertained the idea of preaching Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified, as the Messiah; and, if an apostle, it would be folly to assign any other than St. Matthew.

BEATRICE.

It is indeed possible to fancy the author *deceived*; but I think most persons would do violence to their natural feelings in believing the author a *deceiver*.

EDWARD.

After all, the universal testimony of the church cannot be disregarded for mere conjecture, and particularly when every particle of internal evidence is against that conjecture.

MR. B.

I shall only add a few observations more on these books, viz. that every thing in them confirms the statements given by the fathers, as to the circumstances under which they were written. St. Matthew is said to have been writer of the first, for the use of the Jewish converts in Palestine; St. Mark, for the converts at Rome; St. Luke, for those in Greece; and St. John's, the last, as supplementary to the rest. Now, on examination, every thing appears in strict accordance with this statement. St. Matthew selects those subjects most interesting to the Jews; St. Luke gives details necessary for the Gentiles; St. Matthew speaks of things as well known and common, of which St. Mark gives explanations, which at Rome were necessary; and St. John seems carefully to have avoided the subjects they had discussed, except where his testimony was necessary to leading facts of great importance, and to have dwelt more at large upon those conversations of our Lord with his disciples and with the Jews, which were most interesting and necessary at the time he wrote. He also gives observations of his own, explanatory of the rejection

tion of our Lord by the Jews, which throw light upon the conduct of our Lord towards them, and through the whole narrative seems to dwell upon the character of our Lord with that interest which we might have expected from "the disciple whom Jesus loved."

EDWARD.

These may not add much to the evidence before considered, but they connect the external with the internal evidence.

MR. B.

Again, if we found the Gospels according to St. Matthew and St. Mark excelling the others in purity of style and freedom from Orientalisms, we should have some reason to question the accuracy of the statements which have come down to us. If the works of St. Luke were remarkable for the total want of any thing like the style of one who had travelled and resided in Greece, or retained no Hebraisms, we might doubt whether they were the productions of the companion of St. Paul. If the Gospel of St. John were grossly inaccurate, as to its Greek construction, on the one hand, or entirely free from all mixture of the dialects of the East, on the other, we might in either case hesitate before we received it as the work of a Jew who had for many years resided in Asia Minor. But in all these instances the very reverse is true; and the Gospels are, in language as well as in matter, such as might reasonably have been expected from

persons situated as St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke, and St. John, are said to have been.

BEATRICE.

But might not the accounts of the authors have arisen from observation of these things?

MR. B.

They are not so stated, and it is very improbable that this should have been the case, since the Gospels were not at first in one volume, and did not therefore afford the means of the comparison which we now readily make; nor have we the least reason to believe that such careful observation of the style was ever made by those who have given the above statements; for the first Christians were too much occupied with things to attend much to words. The idea of proving the truth of Christianity from internal evidence, as we now do, could hardly then be said to exist; and it was not needed by those who possessed a much readier method, from their living so near the apostolic times.

EDWARD.

As the genuineness of the greater part of the New Testament appears quite certain, it perhaps is not very material to establish that of the books which at first were not universally received; but is there sufficient reason to believe *these* also are genuine?

MR. B.

Abundantly sufficient, though not to as great an extent as in the case of the rest. The Epistle to the Hebrews was for a time rejected by the Latin church, but was always received by the Greek, and is by Clement of Alexandria ascribed to St. Paul, who appeals also to Pantænus, his preceptor. It is also in the Syriac version; and thus we have in its favour the testimony of all those countries which were best situated for the determination of the truth. The Epistle of St. James being likewise in the Syriac version, must be received as his; that version of course having the greatest weight in a question of this kind, from its antiquity, and the situation of the Syrian Christians with respect to Judea. The Second Epistle of St. Peter, the Second and Third of St. John, and the Epistle of St. Jude, are not in the Syriac version, which may reasonably be accounted for, from its having been made before these epistles were known. The Second Epistle of St. Peter has such strong internal evidence of its genuineness, as proved by comparison with the First, which is undoubtedly genuine, that it must be received. The three other epistles are so very short, and their nature is such, that it is not at all surprising that they were for a time unnoticed, particularly the two former; but these so closely resemble the First Epistle of St. John, that there can be little doubt as to their genuineness; and the Epistle of St. Jude, when

known, was received as his, being quoted as such both by Clement of Alexandria and Origen. The book of Revelation is also quoted frequently by Clement of Alexandria and Origen, and likewise by Irenæus. It is also expressly ascribed to St. John by the latter (whose testimony is of the greatest weight with regard to it) as before seen, and by Justin Martyr at a still earlier period. The defence of Christianity may be maintained without depending upon any of these books; but there is no necessity to give up their authority, since the evidence for their genuineness is far greater than what would be deemed necessary to establish the credit of any common author.

CONVERSATION XI.

MR. B.

WE are now arrived at that part of the evidences of Christianity to which the greatest interest is generally attached, and on which indeed the whole proof of Christianity seems to depend — the credibility of the New Testament. If the accounts of our Lord Jesus Christ be not true, however excellent Christianity may appear, and however singular may be the fact of its continuance to the present day, we can only regard it as the effect of a variety of concurring causes, which it may be interesting, but cannot be absolutely necessary to investigate ; and here, therefore, we may terminate our inquiries. But if, on the other hand, the New Testament be credible as well as genuine, the truth of Christianity is established, and the remainder of our inquiries may be restricted to shewing how far this fact affects others connected with it, or is itself affected by them.

EDWARD.

Do you then consider the whole question as turning upon this one point ?

MR. B.

I do. If Christ be not risen from the dead, all

probabilities in favour of Christianity must fail: if he *is* risen from the dead, they are unnecessary.

EDWARD.

Do you then consider all the internal evidence in behalf of Christianity, arising from its excellence, as useless ?

MR. B.

By no means: it is of the greatest consequence; but the utmost which it can establish, independently of external evidence, is, that the religion is not (according to our notions) unworthy of God.

BEATRICE.

Has it not been denied by some, that the Gospel statements can be proved true by any means whatsoever ?

MR. B.

It has, from the circumstance of their relating miracles.

BEATRICE.

And what is the argument made use of ? If it be valid, all further inquiry is needless.

MR. B.

It is *this*,—that a miracle is contrary to our experience, and therefore no testimony, however strong, can establish it. The fallacy of the argument consists in the ambiguity of the word

experience. It may be certain that a miracle is contrary to our own *personal experience*; but to say that it is contrary to *universal experience*, is what can never be proved, and is assuming the very question at issue. To prove that a miracle never did occur, would require a knowledge which man cannot possess.

BEATRICE.

This is a very contemptible method of quibbling upon a serious subject.

MR. B.

It is, and as such I shall not dwell further upon it. In Leland's "Deistical Writers" you will find some observations on the subject, and in "Beattie's Essay on Truth," "Campbell on Miracles," and "Douglas on Miracles," sufficient answers to the objection. In the beginning of Paley's Evidences, you will find some admirable observations on the same subject.

EDWARD.

But I have met with another objection, that seems much more formidable, which is, "that we can never certainly know what is a miracle and what is not; for a miracle is a deviation from the accustomed course of things, and we are not sufficiently acquainted with the laws of nature to determine when the law is broken."

MR. B.

This is one of the many instances in which it is attempted to explain away common sense by metaphysical refinement, and respecting which I again refer you to Beattie. Suppose we do not know *every* thing relative to the ordinary course of *all* things, does it follow that our knowledge is so circumscribed that we cannot in *some* determine as to whether the general course is observed or broken? An astronomer observes the course of a planet, and determines the law by which that course is directed. He afterwards obtains better instruments, and by fresh observations ascertains that the course is not such as he had before concluded it to be. He examines his calculations, but can detect no error, and is thereby perplexed. He does not thence infer there is a miracle, and justly, because he is aware that he is *not* acquainted with every thing relative to the subject. Perhaps at a subsequent period he detects the cause of the deviations from what appeared to be the natural course dictated by the general law of attraction, to be latent in the universality of that law affecting other bodies, which he had before neglected to take into the account. But what analogy is there between this and the case of a man born blind suddenly restored to sight; a cripple suddenly restored to the use of his limbs; or of a man, who had died some days before, arising from the grave, on being

commanded so to do? I do not know every thing relative to the human body, and the changes it may undergo from various causes; but I *do* know sufficient to inform me that the sound of the human voice has no power over the “dull cold ear of death.” I do not know every thing relative to the nature of water; but I do know that similar bodies similarly situated will be affected in the like manner by the same causes; and that if on the sea of Galilee Peter was sinking at the time his Master walked upon it, that undoubtedly there was a suspension of the accustomed course of nature.

BEATRICE.

I do not think my brother's objection much better than the first.

EDWARD.

But if a deviation from a law of nature take place, it must require amazingly strong evidence to prove it.

MR. B.

The whole resolves itself into a question of probabilities, and as such it ought to be considered; viz. whether it is more probable that the miracle has taken place, or that those who bear witness to it are deceivers or deceived?

BEATRICE.

But, from the nature of the miracles you have

just now cited in illustration, there appears no chance of deception.

MR. B.

There can be very little ; but however we will consider both cases. Now, with regard to the miracles of the New Testament, their probability rests upon the following probabilities ;—that they cannot be disproved ; that the witnesses of them were not deceivers ; that they were not deceived ; that the cause of the performance of these miracles was such as made the interposition of Divine power necessary or expedient.

BEATRICE.

The reason of the three first I see, but not of the last.

MR. B.

A miracle may be said to have been wrought, which I cannot disprove, and which is well attested, but which does not affect me ; but the miracles of the New Testament are expressly given as proofs of the divine origin of the religion therein taught ; and therefore I must be quite certain of their connexion with God, and must be convinced that they are in agreement with what I know of him. If I found the reverse the case, I should conclude that there was a defect in some part or other of the preceding proof, though I might not be able to detect it ; in the same manner that an absurd conclusion in mathe-

matics is allowed to overthrow a theory, however plausible, which has led to it.

EDWARD.

Before we examine the miracles, will it not be as well to examine the credibility of the other parts of the New Testament? since if we detect falsehood in common things, it is not unreasonable to distrust statements of extraordinary events.

MR. B.

Certainly; and first, then, I observe, that with regard to all the leading facts, not miraculous, the statements of the New Testament were allowed by those who were able to have detected falsehood, had it existed, and who were most anxious to destroy their credit. From the enemies of Christianity, and its most bitter antagonists, we may prove the credibility of the New Testament. Celsus, Porphyry, and Julian, must have had the power to detect any gross falsehood; and who that looks at the remains of their works can doubt their anxiety to overthrow Christianity?

But again, the leading facts have never been disputed. Paganism did not become extinct till the sixth century, and with the seventh arose Mahometanism: Judaism never was extinct; yet not one of these three bodies of adversaries have disproved the facts. It was reserved for those of later time to become sceptical upon these points.

BEATRICE.

This is, however, only a general and negative argument in favour of their veracity.

MR. B.

Let us then descend to particulars, and examine them in those points where we have most information from their adversaries, and the truth may positively be ascertained. It is not uncommon for rational and religious prejudices very materially to warp the mind. What accounts, then, do the New Testament writers give of themselves and others,—and how far do these agree with the statements of their adversaries?

Now, with regard to the Jews, look at their own books, their favourite authors, and you will find the nation was not in the least different from the accounts given of them by the writers of the New Testament. Or if you turn from these to Josephus, whom they now abhor, is his account any better? Or do the Pagans give a more favourable account of this proud and bigoted nation?

Again, with regard to the Pagans, St. Paul's statements, strong as they are, do not go beyond those of their own writers, and even to the finer shades we find the same scrupulous accuracy.

Or take the characters of individuals described by both parties. Do the accounts of Herod, Pilate, Agrippa, Felix, and others differ from

those of Josephus and the Roman writers who have mentioned them ?

EDWARD.

And in all these instances prejudice would be likely to influence them.

MR. B.

Again, with regard to themselves, in no respects do they appear to over-rate the character or influence of their converts, in order to magnify their own importance. Pliny, you have seen, bears witness to the purity of their conduct ; nor do any other accounts enable us to detect false statements in this respect.

EDWARD.

Still these are in some respects general statements also : are they found equally correct in minutiae ?

MR. B.

In general we find an accuracy of fact, and sometimes with an appearance of carelessness in expression, which is strongly corroborative of their veracity. To give one example,—St. Luke speaks of Sergius Paulus as proconsul of Cyprus. Now Strabo and Dio expressly state that Cyprus was a prætorian and not a proconsular province : and till very lately it was supposed, on their authority, that St. Luke was incorrect ; but closer investigation has proved his accuracy in

this respect, a coin having been found, bearing an inscription, in which the very term used by St. Luke occurs. We find similar accuracy wherever the scene of action is laid. Now even a learned man, however well informed on general topics, could hardly have preserved uniform accuracy in all points of a work of fiction on so extended a scale; and the most consummate art would be requisite to preserve it with that appearance of freedom and carelessness observable in these books.

BEATRICE.

If the apostles had not really lived and travelled as they profess to have done, it is then most improbable that they would have adhered to truth so closely, or indeed have been informed of facts so minute, as to escape the observation of more learned men.

MR. B.

In the narratives of the Gospels, there is the same propriety of expression with regard to things purely local, which at least fully proves that the whole was so familiar to the writer's mind, that he naturally made use of proper and determinate expressions. Palestine to this day remains an evidence for the veracity of the evangelists,—a noble evidence, whose testimony cannot be silenced or misrepresented.

BEATRICE.

But if we find them correct with regard to historical and geographical minutiae, we must conclude that they were writing altogether what was true; or that they were engaged in compiling a laboured, false account with the greatest care, and affecting accuracy in some things, the truth of which could be ascertained, that they might be the more readily believed in others, when this was not the case.

MR. B.

Yet nothing can be more contrary to matter of fact than the latter supposition; for from one end to the other common facts are mentioned with the greatest indifference, or merely alluded to so as to connect the narrative of the life of their Master with the history of the times, and enable all, by the mention of time and place, to ascertain the reality of the extraordinary occurrences on which their attention was fixed. There is no effort in the Gospels, no display; all minor considerations are lost sight of in the greatness of the subject on which the authors are engaged; and even then, it is not so much the giving a full account of our Lord, as the stating what they themselves knew, as in the case of St. Matthew and St. John, or of the truth of which they were assured by eye-witnesses, as in the case of St. Luke and St. Mark.

EDWARD.

If these writers had to support a false story, it is indeed improbable that they should have thus acted; that they should have neglected to avail themselves of their own advantages, and left themselves exposed to animadversion from the narratives being different.

MR. B.

But besides this positive testimony to the veracity of the evangelists, we must not omit the negative testimony afforded, in that their enemies never denied many things, which, if false, they must have had the power of detecting and exposing. It concerned the whole Jewish nation to shew the falsity of the pretensions of him whom they had put to death, to deny or to vindicate the accounts given of the conduct of their rulers, with regard to his crucifixion. It afterwards became a matter of the greatest consequence to the Roman empire to decide upon this question. The Christians had increased in numbers and influence to a great degree, and persecutions only added to their strength. What then was the direct course to be pursued, if the Christian statements could be proved false? Certainly to prove that *fact*. The evangelists had given all the details of the death of the Founder of this religion with the utmost care, and the Christian apologists in later times were ever daring them to the proof. If Pilate

never had condemned our Lord to the peculiar kind of death, and under all the circumstances alleged, why was not the fact disproved? The Christians justly laid the greatest stress upon the leading events of the life of their Master: that an extraordinary person was at that particular time expected to arise, was known throughout the whole of the eastern parts of the empire, and probably in the west also; that the Jews were in full expectation that he was to spring from the house of David, and that the time for his appearance was come, is also known. The full belief of that nation induced them to brave all the power of the Roman empire, and to the very last they were sanguine in their hopes of the appearance of the Messias. Now under these circumstances a person did appear, whose life so influenced many, that the whole world was shortly after astonished at their boldness, their zeal, and perseverance. There appeared a stronger probability every year that they would ultimately succeed; and yet neither Jews nor Romans, though most desirous to crush them, attempted that which would have had the greatest tendency.

BEATRICE.

The New Testament statements have never, then, been shewn to be false, as regards our Lord?

MR. B.

They have not; and on this I lay the greatest

stress; for if there had been the means of proving them false, it is utterly incredible that they should have been acknowledged as true.

BEATRICE.

But *all* the New Testament statements have not been acknowledged as true.

MR. B.

None have been *proved* to be false, and some of the greatest importance have been owned true.

EDWARD.

What is confessed as true?

MR. B.

It is owned that Christ worked miracles.

BEATRICE.

But by whom?

MR. B.

Both Jews and Pagans.

BEATRICE.

But by any near the time of Christ?

MR. B.

Even by the *first* antagonist of his religion, Celsus.

BEATRICE.

But if he owned the fact, why did he not become a Christian?

MR. B.

Because he absurdly supposed those miracles could have been wrought by magic, which we know they could not. The Jews had the same mode of accounting for them. Now no reasoning upon the subject whatsoever can get over the stubborn fact, that the miracles of Christ were acknowledged by those of his opponents who lived nearest to his time, and had the best means of ascertaining the truth.

EDWARD.

But if this be admitted, the whole question seems decided.

MR. B.

It does not follow that because enemies as well as friends believed that he worked miracles, that therefore he *did*: it only follows, that we have no means of proving that he did not, by means of historical testimony. But unless we find reason to believe, from internal evidence, that deception was practised, then we must also conclude that those miracles were really wrought.

EDWARD.

And therefore we must examine as to the probability of the apostles having been deceivers.

BEATRICE.

There can be little chance for any one who now

attempts this, since their first enemies could not overthrow those statements in which fraud was most open to detection.

EDWARD.

We do not know that the miracles were so open to detection. The leading facts of the life of Christ might be true, exclusively of the miracles; and the miracles may have been appended to it, to give authority to his precepts.

BEATRICE.

They may; but, from my recollection of them, I do not think it probable; for, though some of them were private, the greater part were public.

EDWARD.

But if it was believed that miracles could be performed by the power of magic, they might have been less examined than they ought to have been at the time: the accounts were not published till after his death, and then probably with exaggerations, supposing that pretensions were really made to this power from the very beginning, which is by no means certain.

MR. B.

We will examine, then, into the probability that the apostles added these miracles, to give authority to the precepts of their Master.

If it be supposed that our Lord Jesus Christ

was only a very superior character, who vainly attempted the reformation of the Jewish nation, and was, in consequence, put to death ; and this is the only supposition that can be formed by those who admit historical testimony, but are unwilling to acknowledge the performance of miracles ; then we must inquire, of what nature was his doctrine and manner of life—how far it would be consistent with the allowance of an attempt to deceive for the purposes of general good—and how far it was acted upon by his apostles.

EDWARD.

Upon this hypothesis, then, our Lord would be a sort of Jewish Socrates ; and his disciples, seeing the bad result of their Master's attempt to reform his nation without the assumption of miraculous powers, after his death gave him that to which he himself made no pretension.

MR. B.

Now I think it is quite certain, that, if this had been the case, they would, at least, have made as free with his *doctrines* as with his *life* ; for with regard to his precepts, few could detect any false statements ; with respect to miracles, they were at the mercy of every enemy.

BEATRICE.

It certainly seems probable that they would

somewhat soften and accommodate their statements to public prejudice.

MR. B.

Now what are their doctrines? what are the precepts put into the mouth of their Lord? The world has never seen a stronger expression of detestation of hypocrisy and insincerity than the whole of these writings manifest. With regard to the nature of God, as a *Spirit*, and with respect to his worshippers, who are to "*worship him in spirit and in truth*," the language is uniform and decisive, to so great a degree, as utterly to exclude all idea of the men who spent their lives in promulgating such opinions entertaining any hope that by *deception* they could recommend this religion. Of those "*who do evil that good may come*," they teach that "*their damnation is just*;" they threaten eternal vengeance against "*all liars*;" and the most terrible miracle recorded in the volume is connected with "*lying unto the Holy Ghost*." If any fact be certain, this is most surely so, that their *professed doctrine* did not admit of any thing like deception, even for the most beneficial end. If now a *single* miracle were disproved, by their own uniform doctrine they were accursed.

BEATRICE.

And in those times it was in the power of any one to ascertain the truth, so that they never would have run so great a risk.

MR. B.

Now before we consider the miracles related of our Lord, let us refer to those connected with St. Paul. Among the common historical facts which are generally admitted, I think we must admit St. Paul's defences before the sanhedrin, to Felix, and Agrippa. They were public acts, and can no more be denied than the trials of Archbishop Laud or Lord William Russell. Now would St. Paul, upon such an occasion, solemnly state the fact of a miraculous interposition from heaven, in the presence of those who undoubtedly could have produced witnesses to prove the contrary, had his statement been false? St. Paul's previous life was known, as he asserts, to all the Jews; the fact of his conversion was equally notorious. By his change of religion, he made the heaviest charge against the rulers of Judea which could be made against men; and, from the nature of the case, their rage against him must have been excited to the very utmost. Now under these circumstances, I say, that *mere madness* alone could have prompted his conduct in the first instance in joining the Christians, or, in the second, in adopting such a method of defence, unless the miracle was real.

BEATRICE.

Festus accused him of madness.

MR. B.

And what followed?

“ But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely : for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him ; for this thing was not done in a corner. King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets ? I know that thou believest. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. And Paul said, I would to God that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.”—*Acts*, xxvi. 25—29.

EDWARD.

Festus, in accusing him of madness, imputed it to too much learning.

MR. B.

And the whole of St. Paul's epistles and speeches prove not only his learning, but his “ truth and soberness.” So long as the writings of St. Paul remain, the infidel will have to acknowledge in them a greater miracle than the one he seeks to escape, in rejecting the account of St. Paul's conversion. It appears to me absolutely impossible to account for the difference between St. Paul's writings, and those of the Jews who lived nearest to his time, upon any other principle than that of real conversion, occasioned by a real miracle. Why should St. Paul have so differed from others who sat at the feet of Gamaliel ? Why should he, rather than any other, become a martyr to the faith he had before persecuted ? Why should this Jew, rather than any other, from a narrow bigot, become

the most active philanthropist the world has yet seen? Why should Paul of Tarsus alone teach truth with a certainty, which no difference of place could alter, no length of time diminish?

EDWARD.

Might not his intercourse with other nations make the difference?

MR. B.

Had he alone intercourse with them? Look at the philosophy of Philo, or compare the apostle with Josephus. It was neither Grecian philosophy nor Grecian patriotism that taught St. Paul; that made him very "*gladly spend and be spent, though the more he laboured, the less he was loved;*" that made him account himself "*a debtor both to the Greeks and to the barbarians, to the wise and to the unwise.*" The more you consider the character of St. Paul, the more convinced you must become of the truth of the miracles of the New Testament; for nothing else can account for it. The good Lord Lyttelton wrote an excellent little book on this subject, which you ought by all means to read.

EDWARD.

But might not the excellency of the Christian religion produce those effects on St. Paul, independently of miraculous agency? Might he not have been deceived, and his mind being strongly

worked upon, make him thus zealous, in what he deemed a good cause?

MR. B.

St. Paul could not have been deceived. The miracle was wrought at a time when no prejudice of his mind favoured deception; in open day; in the open country; it affected others as well as himself; and its effects on him were permanent, so that no doubt could remain of the reality of "the heavenly vision." His blindness was miraculously inflicted, and miraculously removed.

BEATRICE.

His own writings prove also that he was a man not easily imposed upon; and from his life, we cannot think he would impose upon others.

MR. B.

We have yet one more test, and that decides the whole matter, proving he neither could have been deceived nor deceive. We have before seen that his epistles were genuine.

BEATRICE.

Undoubtedly: the undesigned coincidence observable in them, when compared with each other, and with the Acts of the Apostles, in addition to their universal reception as his, fully establishes it.

EDWARD.

On that there can be no doubt.

MR. B.

But in these epistles St. Paul asserts, *that he himself worked miracles, and that he had communicated extraordinary powers to others also.* Here no possibility of deception remains. It is not easy to say how far the senses may be imposed upon; but no human power whatsoever can produce on another effects like these. No artifice of the other apostles could enable St. Paul to heal the cripple at Lystra—to recall Eutychus to life; no persuasion on the part of St. Paul, or enthusiasm in themselves, could induce the Corinthians to believe they had received from him the power of speaking languages they had never learned.

EDWARD.

And yet this must have been the case, since the Corinthians received it as genuine, and endured every suffering in consequence, rather than renounce Christianity.

MR. B.

The conclusions which Paley draws, at the end of his *Horæ Paulinæ*, are all that is necessary to state on this subject.

1. That Christianity was not a story set on foot, amidst the confusions which attended, and immediately preceded, the destruction of Jerusalem; when many extravagant reports were circulated; when men's minds were broken by terror and distress; when, amidst the tumults that surrounded them, inquiry was impracticable. These letters show incontestably, that the

religion had fixed and established itself before this state of things took place.

2. Whereas it hath been insinuated, that our Gospels may have been made up of reports and stories which were current at the time, we may observe, that, with respect to the Epistles, this is impossible.

3. These letters prove, that the converts to Christianity were not drawn from the barbarous, the mean, or the ignorant set of men, which the representations of infidelity would sometimes make them.

4. St. Paul's history, I mean so much of it as may be collected from his letters, is so implicated with that of the other apostles, and with the substance indeed of the Christian history itself, that I apprehend it will be found impossible to admit St. Paul's story (I do not speak of the miraculous part of it) to be true, and yet to reject the rest as fabulous.

5. St. Paul's letters furnish evidence (and what better evidence than a man's own letters can be desired?) of the soundness and sobriety of his judgment.

6. These letters are decisive, as to the sufferings of the author; also as to the distressed state of the Christian church, and the dangers which attended the preaching of the Gospel.

7. St. Paul in these letters asserts in positive and unequivocal terms his performance of miracles, strictly and properly so called.

CONVERSATION XII.

MR. B.

THE conversion of St. Paul, and his continuance in the faith of Christ till death, with the evidence collected from his letters, would alone be sufficient to establish the reality of the miracles of the New Testament to any reasonable mind ; but beyond this we may extend the proof, and from the Gospels themselves defend the truth of those parts of their contents which relate miraculous events.

BEATRICE.

There is a peculiar interest attached to the miracles of our Lord.

MR. B.

That the other apostles were neither deceivers nor deceived is equally certain with the case of St. Paul. Out of twelve whom he selected, one indeed proved false, but instantly bore melancholy testimony to the truth, by putting an end to his life. The remaining eleven, with one elected in the place of the traitor, continued till death firm in the faith of their Master. Most of them sealed their testimony with their blood ; and if any did not, the expectation of a cruel death was at least common to all.

BEATRICE.

They could hardly have had this fortitude, but from the conviction that their labours were acceptable to God ; which from their own doctrines they could not have, if they “ handled the word of God deceitfully.”

MR. B.

They could not: nor is it by any means conceivable that they believed otherwise than they taught.

EDWARD.

Can there be no supposition of a secret doctrine only known to themselves ? Many sects have had two sets of opinions, one for themselves, and one for the public.

MR. B.

That there is no trace of any secret doctrine distinct from that avowed is certain ; and if it had ever existed, we must have had some vestiges of it left. If such were held by the apostles, how could it be concealed from Timothy, Titus, and their fellow-labourers ? and if revealed to them, why not to their successors ? and if so, when did this secret doctrine first cease to be transmitted ? If fraud were necessary at the commencement, was it less necessary hereafter ? If it ever existed at all, is it credible that, among the numbers who were liable to martyrdom, none should reveal it—that, amidst the rage of conflicting parties among themselves, no hint of it should be found ?

BEATRICE.

There is certainly no trace of it in the Scriptures, which is of most importance.

MR. B.

In St. Paul's Epistles to Timothy and Titus, where we might have expected to meet with it, if any where, we only find the same language. Every thing is still directed to be done, as of a "pure conscience, and faith unfeigned;" and the "end of the commandment is charity" here as elsewhere. In St. Paul's other Epistles, and in the Epistles of St. John, St. Peter, St. Jude, and St. James, the same integrity, the same purity of heart are required: nor is there any passage which can be tortured into any thing like an insinuation of the reverse of "simplicity and godly sincerity." Every portion of their writings exhibits them as men of the deepest piety—as men who would abhor the wickedness of recommending a course of life as of divine authority which they knew was not so.

EDWARD.

But might not their real sentiments be altogether concealed? Prosperity and adversity exhibit the same characters under very different lights.

MR. B.

But that we have their real sentiments we may rest assured, from the degree of intelligence which

we perceive in them, and our knowledge of their situation in life. Their works prove to us, that they could not have entertained the chimerical thought of establishing the religion they preached without Divine aid. They had, unless the miracles of our Lord were real, no motive for attempting it; they were, unless supported by Divine power, manifestly unfit for it; they were by education, and the circumstances of birth, wholly indisposed towards it. Their Master had preached in Palestine, and been crucified in consequence. Were they so infatuated as to think they should escape, and that out of Judea, where their nation was hated, they should meet with a better reception?

EDWARD.

It does not appear probable; but men sometimes run great risks for the chance of great gains.

MR. B.

But what could they gain? If any hope of gain did exist, it must have been founded on the chance of success, and without Divine aid they had no chance. They made *all* men their enemies, and that not indifferent, but violent enemies. They attacked the vices and prejudices of men in such a manner that no chance remained for their party but by the obstinate perseverance of their converts; and unquestionably the apostles were the most likely to fall first. Hear St. Paul:

“ For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death : for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. We are fools for Christ’s sake, but ye are wise in Christ ; we are weak, but ye are strong ; ye are honourable, but we are despised. Even unto this present hour we both hunger and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place ; and labour, working with our own hands : being reviled, we bless ; being persecuted, we suffer it ; being defamed, we entreat : we are made as the offscouring of all things unto this day.” 1 Cor. iv. 9—13.

BEATRICE.

But did they *always* expect suffering ?

MR. B.

Not before the resurrection of our Lord. We previously find them sanguine in their hopes of advancement, and calculating upon the future. Yet they tell us that from the beginning they were warned, that “ in the world they should have tribulation.” Afterwards we find they not only professed to expect this for themselves, but even inculcated the same upon their converts. “ We ought also to lay down our lives for the brethren,” says St. John. “ Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you : but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings,” says St. Peter. “ My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations,” says St. James.

BEATRICE.

Language like this could never have been used by impostors. It is contrary to common sense to suppose that any one would attempt to establish a religion, when he inculcated such precepts, unless he was supported by the integrity of his intention, and the consciousness of the approval of his Maker.

MR. B.

If it be supposed that the apostles were deceivers, they must be allowed to have had some of the qualifications of deceivers. But the whole of the New Testament is so found in opposition to all that was then most likely to succeed, that this opinion cannot be retained with the least regard to consistency. No deceiver would run in all things counter to prejudice, would neglect to lay hold on some failing, or to avail himself of some prevailing passion. No impostor could venture upon such an undertaking without securing some present aid, or holding out to his followers the expectation of future support.

EDWARD.

But the disciples had no such hope; for their preaching was "to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness."

MR. B.

We are hardly sufficiently aware of the absurdity which then appeared in "preaching Christ

crucified." We have got used to the idea ; and it is only by the horror with which the Jews regard the notion of their Messiah thus suffering that we can form any adequate idea of the hopelessness of attempting such a cause without the certain support of Divine aid. In the works of the Pagan antagonists of Christianity we have some traces of the manner in which the more polished nations of antiquity regarded it, as you have already seen.

EDWARD.

But might they not hope that their report of miracles would influence others as much as the actual performance of miracles would influence themselves?

MR. B.

I do not think that they would have had any idea of the influence of miracles upon the mind, if they had not seen them. As to the world at large, they must have known that the report of miracles could have but little influence, for all sorts of tales of prodigies were current. The few real miracles that had been performed of old time had taught the priests of all the then existing superstitions to pretend to wonders of some kind or other, till all were falling into contempt. Even the actual evidence of miracles was not sufficient to overcome the prejudice some had to Christianity ; and the then current answer to all pretensions of this kind, viz. the imputing them to

magical arts, and the influence of evil spirits, must have been known to them as well as their enemies. If they found themselves supernaturally endowed with the power of working miracles, they had the evidence in themselves that God was with them, and they could have no doubt that their Lord and Master was risen from the dead; but without that power, they might after a time have doubted of the reality of what they had seen with their own eyes, and have returned to their former occupations: and without that knowledge of the reality, it seems inconceivable to suppose they would have persisted in a course in which their Master had perished. Had they been deceivers, they must have been conscious that a religion such as Christianity would inevitably bring upon its votaries persecution, as upon its Founder. If they had wished to render it subservient to their interest, they would have altered it to suit the popular taste; but by persisting in it, despite of warnings and example, they prove beyond all doubt their sincerity; they establish beyond all question the reality of their belief in the miracles of Jesus of Nazareth.

BEATRICE.

There does not appear any other way of accounting for their conduct upon rational principles, than that they were what they profess to be, sincere and upright servants of God, fully con-

vinced that Jesus of Nazareth was sent from Him and that the miracles he had wrought were a sufficient attestation of a divine mission.

EDWARD.

Nor does it seem possible to account them deceivers, since their conduct proves they neglected every art which deceivers would have cultivated, and threw the reality of their pretensions upon a proof which was least likely to win over converts.

MR. B.

But if the apostles were not deceivers, we can ourselves determine that they were not deceived; for the narratives which are given us are such, that no place for deception remains. The miracles performed by our Lord were too numerous, and too evident, to leave any doubt upon the mind; they left none upon the minds of those who witnessed them, whether friends or foes.

BEATRICE.

But from the belief that miracles might be performed without the intervention of the Supreme Being, is it not probable that these miracles were less carefully examined into than they ought to have been?

MR. B.

Some of them appear to have been very strictly inquired into, as in the case of the man born

blind, whose eyes were opened, as related by St. John, when the Pharisees examined both the man and his parents. No doubt appears to have been entertained by the council which assembled to consult upon the raising of Lazarus. The reasoning employed upon that occasion is very singular, and strikingly exemplifies the belief and expectations of the Jews at that time.

“Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for *this man doeth many miracles*. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him; and the Romans shall come, and take away both our place and nation.”—*John*, xi. 47, 48.

In what manner the Jews brought themselves to act against the evidence of miracles we cannot at this distance of time clearly determine, nor is it of any great importance, considering the wretched state into which that nation had fallen. We want not their reasonings upon the fact: all that is necessary for us is the fact itself; and there certainly is no fact more universally attested than this,—that the Founder of Christianity did work miracles. It is altogether out of the power of any one to disprove it by testimony; and it can therefore only be overthrown by internal evidence against it, or by its leading to absurd and impossible conclusions in confirming the truth of the Christian religion.

BEATRICE.

Contradictions in the accounts of the miracles would overthrow the whole.

MR. B.

But no such contradictions are to be found. You must remember a most material distinction is to be drawn between *varying* and *contradictory* accounts of the same fact. Three persons giving an account of the same fact will each relate what fell immediately before his own eyes, and affected his own mind most forcibly. It would require a *second* miracle to make all the witnesses of a miracle agree in their accounts of it, to that degree which some would require; for it certainly would be a violation of the usual course of things that the same event should strike different persons, differently situated in all points, alike, and that independent witnesses should give precisely the same account.

EDWARD.

If witnesses thus agreed, it would have very much the appearance of design.

BEATRICE.

Is there not *too much* agreement, instead of *too little*, in the statements of the three first evangelists? May we not thence infer they copied from each other?

MR. B.

There are insuperable objections to the hypothesis of their having copied from each other; and the accounting both for the matter and for the words which they have in common is attended with considerable difficulties. You will find in the notes to Michaelis an ingenious hypothesis by the learned translator, which has excited a good deal of controversy upon the subject, and has not yet led to any decision. There can be little doubt that the translator of St. Matthew has availed himself of the Gospels of St. Mark and St. Luke, where they had matter in common with the first, which accounts in some measure for the verbal agreement; but we know too little respecting the origin of the Gospels, for any great advances to be made towards the elucidation of the subject.

EDWARD.

What matter they have in common, if unaccompanied by contradictory circumstances, must materially strengthen the credibility of the whole.

MR. B.

It does so: for hitherto no circumstances have been adduced of such a nature as to shake our belief. You will bear in mind also, that all which has been said before, as to the genuineness of these books, also confirms their credibility; for upon the truth of these narrations of miracles

N.

numbers hazarded their lives and all that was dear to them. The miracles of our Lord were expressly wrought to sanction his doctrine: upon the truth of that doctrine all the hopes of the first Christians depended; for the sake of that doctrine they ran the greatest risks, and underwent the greatest hardships; they would not therefore believe those miracles without the best authority.

BEATRICE.

But many persons have often been led away by false miracles: many Roman Catholics believe in miracles which Protestants despise.

MR. B.

That there have been many false miracles is undeniable, and that numbers have been deceived by them is equally true; but that does not in the least invalidate the fact of any well-authenticated miracle having been wrought.

BEATRICE.

But how shall a distinction be drawn between the true and the false?

MR. B.

Leslie, in his *Short and Easy Method with the Deists*, has given the following rules:—

“ 1. That the matter of fact be such, as that men’s outward senses, their eyes and ears, may be judges of it.

“ 2. That it be done publicly in the face of the world.

“ 3. That not only public monuments be kept up in memory of it, but some outward actions to be performed.

“ 4. That such monuments and such actions or observances be instituted, and do commence from the time that the matter of fact was done.”—*LESLIE'S Works*, vol. i. p. 11.

Of these the two first exclude the possibility of imposition at the time, and the two last subsequently.

EDWARD.

Are there examples given of the application of these rules ?

MR. B.

Leslie applies them, 1st, to Moses ; 2dly, to Christ ; and, 3dly, to Mahomet ; and concludes on the whole, that no fabulous action has all these marks ; that there is greater certainty for Christianity than for other received facts ; and that the importance of the subject makes deception more difficult.

BEATRICE.

And have no miracles been ascertained as answering the conditions required in these rules except those of the Bible ?

MR. B.

None, as far as my knowledge extends ; and I believe the rules are pretty generally admitted as conclusive.

BEATRICE.

In what manner can the force of the evidences

for the miracles of the New Testament be evaded, admitting its genuineness?

MR. B.

The most singular perhaps is one which was attempted about an hundred years ago—in maintaining that they were to be understood allegorically, and not literally.

BEATRICE.

What could possibly give rise to so strange an idea?

MR. B.

Possibly a similar attempt made a short time before, in which the force of the argument from prophecy was attacked in the same way. It is hardly necessary to add, that both were wholly unavailing.

BEATRICE.

Was then the attempt to overthrow the miracles given up?

MR. B.

The great miracle of all, the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, was more particularly attacked, which produced many excellent defences of it, particularly Sherlock's "Trial of the Witnesses," in which the evidence for this particular miracle is placed in a very striking light.

EDWARD.

But are there not serious difficulties, if not

contradictions, in the account of the resurrection?

MR. B.

I think the work just mentioned will satisfy you; but you may also read Mr. West's book on the same subject, in which he has harmonised the accounts of the evangelists very satisfactorily.

BEATRICE.

All the evangelists bear witness to that fact.

MR. B.

Not only so; but

"It is completely certain that the apostles of Christ and the first teachers of Christianity asserted the fact; and this would have been certain if the four Gospels had been lost or never written. Every piece of Scripture recognises the resurrection; every epistle of every apostle, every author contemporary with the apostles, of the age immediately succeeding the apostles, every writing from that age to the present, genuine or spurious, on the side of Christianity or against it, concur in representing the resurrection of Christ as an article of his history received without doubt or disagreement by all who called themselves Christians, as alleged from the beginning by the propagators of the institution, and alleged as the centre of their testimony."—*PALEY*, vol. ii. p. 97.

EDWARD.

On these accounts it is no wonder that the Jews, who acknowledge the other miracles of our Lord, should deny this; and it may well be the great object of infidels to overthrow it.

MR. B.

The fact seems, however, beyond the reach of human power to disturb. The New Testament statement of the resurrection accounts satisfactorily for that which without it is unaccountable. The Jewish account of the body being stolen whilst the guards stationed to watch at the sepulchre were asleep is palpably absurd: the body never could be produced or traced, nor has any tolerable account yet been drawn up more probable. If the resurrection had not taken place, there was no reason why the disciples should propagate this new faith; they were Jews, and must have looked for another; they were poor and unlearned men, wholly unequal to contending with the power of the state, and must have been more disposed to let the matter be forgotten than to expose themselves for one who had disappointed their expectations. On this great fact every one can judge: all parties agree that the Founder of this religion was put to death; all agree that his first followers were taken from very low stations; all agree that, from the time assigned for his resurrection, the exertions of his followers were great and successful, beyond any thing in the history of mankind. It is also certain that from them we have received the only system of professedly revealed religion capable of universal dissemination, and adapted for every age, which

has yet been produced ; that this alone contains a perfect morality, and motives sufficiently powerful to affect all ranks and stations in life. We also know that to transmit this to us they endured the heaviest afflictions, and closed lives of the most arduous exertion by painful and ignominious deaths ; and to the last persisted in giving the same account, and made the fact of the resurrection of their Lord their great ground of consolation, as they had ever made it the great motive for action. Now, under all these circumstances, who will venture to reject their testimony ? who will be so affectedly incredulous as to doubt the truth of that thus solemnly assured to him, and yet be so grossly credulous as to believe that a dozen fishermen and the like, in a despised corner of a despised province of the Roman empire, *totally destitute of all outward help*, could project and execute such a project as the overthrow of the various religions which were held throughout its territory, though interwoven with the state, with domestic life, and with the recollections of past glory ?

BEATRICE.

It cannot be : their statement must be true.

MR. B.

But if any Jew, or set of Jews, had intellect to project such an undertaking, would they not also have something like common sense in conducting

it? Would they attempt the most arduous of all schemes by the very means likely to ruin it? Wherever was there a false religion founded upon such a basis, or promulgated by such means? But by what calculation of chances are we to account for these men purging their minds from the prejudices of their nation, and rising far above all that have preceded or followed them;—striking at every species of vice with so bold and yet so unerring an aim; turning the human heart inside out, as though they had all their lives been absorbed in the study of it; expressing the most important truths in the most unpolished language; teaching by example as well as precept; and, to crown all, composing a character, the elements of which were to all others unknown; developing its excellencies in the most varied and difficult situations, and yet preserving to it such an appearance of nature, that the mind is constrained to own its reality as well as perfection?

EDWARD.

And yet these men have left no other trace behind them but this religion. If this had been merely human, surely some further information would have descended to us.

MR. B.

But why should such men make such an attempt? Why, as Jews, should they seek to over-

throw the fondest hopes of their country? Why, as men, should they act so contrary to the conduct of all others, as to inculcate the fear of God, by means which they knew hateful to Him? What could be their motive—what their ultimate object? They did not unite for secular advantage to themselves, nor for their children, nor for their friends, nor for their country.

BEATRICE.

It is unnecessary saying more; for nothing but contradiction in the religion itself can overthrow the force of the facts, that the New Testament was delivered to us by such men, and under such circumstances.

MR. B.

Nothing else can; and this you must therefore bear in mind. We have proceeded step by step, till we have arrived at the conclusion that miracles were wrought, which prove Christianity to be true; for it cannot be necessary to argue in these days against magic; nor can it need any long consideration to show that the power of suspending the laws of nature is in the hands of Him alone who ordained those laws. If we may not conclude that the miracles of the New Testament were really wrought, all reliance upon any testimony, however strong, must be at an end, and no settled principles of action between man

and man can subsist : if we may not conclude from those miracles, that the religion in question is of divine origin, all confidence towards God also must cease ; and practical if not theoretical atheism must be the result.

EDWARD.

Do you then think it necessary to pursue the subject further ?

MR. B.

The accumulative force of the evidences of Christianity is not yet seen ; but the first great point is gained, viz. that if Christianity cannot be proved to be false, it must be admitted as true ; by which I mean that the evidence already adduced is of that nature, that nothing short of the observance of the religion involving an *impossibility* can overthrow it, without overthrowing all the common principles by which the moral world is kept together.

BEATRICE.

We must see then what the religion involves, and inquire how far it can be observed.

MR. B.

The religion of the New Testament involves several very important considerations, and in its details perhaps the sceptic may expect to find

that weakness which could not be detected in its evidences. But if in these branches also we find additional probability that it is from God, no excuse will remain for him, who upon less chances would deem it the height of folly to pursue a different line of conduct to what prudence dictated.

BEATRICE.

How will you then consider the remaining portions of this subject ?

MR. B.

If the New Testament be inspired, as is generally believed, any fault inconsistent with that inspiration overthrows its claims. If the religion therein inculcated profess to be of universal obligation, when from the nature of things this cannot be the case, it also falls to the ground. If it be founded upon the Old Testament, and be connected with it, as forming one system of religion, any objection which will overthrow the foundation will destroy the superstructure also.

EDWARD.

These points then we have to consider; viz. the inspiration of the New Testament, the doctrines and precepts of the religion, and its connexion with a previous dispensation in the Old Testament.

MR. B.

And this we shall do in a reverse order to that mentioned; that first we may understand the true nature of this religion, as to its general place in the dispensations of God towards mankind; then that the extent of its influence upon the mind may properly be manifest; and, lastly, that we may be fully aware how far the Holy Scriptures afford us an unerring rule, by which to regulate our opinions and our conduct.

EDWARD.

In the course of this also we must consider how far objections lie against Christianity, as arising from historical difficulties, philosophical truth, or as connected with morals. In all this it will be necessary to be careful that we do not assign more to the Holy Scriptures than what properly belongs to them, lest we make them fail through weak additions attached to them; and at the same time that we do not attribute more to our knowledge, derived from other sources, than it really is entitled to.

MR. B.

We must, however, at the same time not fear to expose Christianity, as thus revealed, to the strictest scrutiny; for the simple and entire truth is our great object; and if, through partiality for

either side, we evade the real question, we both expose ourselves to deception, and, even if by chance we are right in our determination, we lose all just grounds of confidence.

CONVERSATION XIII.

MR. B.

CHRISTIANITY professes not only to be a divine revelation, it claims also to be founded on previous revelations made from the earliest time to the ancestors of the Jews ; to Moses, their great law-giver, and to various prophets in succession, till about 400 years before the Christian era.

EDWARD.

If these claims be well founded, the objection brought by sceptics, as being partial with respect to time, is made void.

MR. B.

We thus make a very important advance towards establishing the certainty of the Christian revelation itself ; for the books to which appeal is made have been in the care and keeping of the bitterest enemies of Christianity : so that if they bear witness to it, we not only enlarge the foundation on which Christianity is placed, but also bind the whole together, each part strengthening the other.

EDWARD.

But have not doubts been entertained with regard to the Old Testament, by those who have

been fully persuaded of the divine origin of Christianity?

MR. B.

So it would appear, if we may give credit to the statements of some writers; but how it is possible to sever the two appears to me inconceivable. Addressing the Jews, our Lord says,

“Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me.—*John*, v. 39.

In an interview with two of his disciples after his resurrection, we are told,

“Beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.”—*Luke*, xxiv. 27.

And shortly after, when in the presence of the apostles,

“He said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures, and said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day,” &c.—*Luke*, xxiv. 44.

BEATRICE.

This is decisive as to the alleged connexion between the Old and New Testaments.

MR. B.

And of the great importance of this connexion we are fully assured by the references of our Lord

to it, and by the conduct of the apostles. The New Testament is full of this subject; and from the earliest times it was the custom, as in the case of Apollos, to prove from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.

BEATRICE.

But what Scriptures were these which were thus read? How shall we be assured that we have the same?

MR. B.

This demands an inquiry of a similar nature to that formerly requisite for the New Testament. We must first inquire as to what are the canonical books, and, secondly, as to their integrity. With regard to the former, our labour is greatly shortened by now having the supreme authority of our Lord to appeal to. What he acknowledged as of divine authority, must be so; and the only difficulty is to ascertain how far his approval extended.

EDWARD.

But the books of the Old Testament may also be established independently of the New Testament, as to their genuineness, integrity, and credibility.

MR. B.

They may; and it is on such grounds that they are held by the Jews. Many defences of Christianity begin with proving the authority of the

Old Testament, and afterwards, by comparing the New Testament with it, establish the truth of the latter; but in arguing in favour of Christianity, as a divine revelation, against those who acknowledge no divine revelation, we must of course take that method which is most strictly demonstrative,—and such appears to me that adopted by Bishop Marsh, in his Lectures,—of first proving the Divine authority of the New Testament, which is certainly of easier proof; and thence inferring the authority of the Old Testament, as connected with it.

EDWARD.

This method does not, however, at all impugn the proof independent of Christianity.

MR. B.

By no means; if by that is meant only such a proof as establishes the religion of Moses up to the coming of our Lord: beyond that, the evidence for the Old Testament would not only fail, but positive proof would lie against it, if Christianity be not admitted as its completion.

BEATRICE.

So that in either case we come to the same conclusions. The New Testament is requisite for the fulfilment of the Old, and the latter is an equally necessary preliminary to the former. If either can be proved false, as involved with each

other, both will fall to the ground : if neither can be proved false, the proof in favour of each becomes doubly strong.

EDWARD.

Much more than doubly strong ; for the whole probability does not proceed by addition of the chances in each case, but by the multiplication of them, provided that the proofs of the divine origin of each (as unconnected with each other) are independent of each other.

MR. B.

The first thing to be ascertained is, what books were held by our Lord as of divine authority ?

BEATRICE.

In two of the passages you before quoted, he only speaks of the Scriptures generally ; and in the third, of the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms.

MR. B.

It is then necessary to determine what was meant by these expressions in our Lord's time. But these expressions are precisely those made use of to denote the Hebrew Bible as now received. To the five first books they have long given the title of *the Law*, or *the Law of Moses* ; to the historical and prophetical books, they gave the name of *the Prophets*, as having been written by them ; and to the remaining books, viz. the

writings of David and Solomon, the book of Job, the book of Lamentations, and the books of Ruth, Chronicles, Esther, Daniel, Nehemiah, and Ezra, they gave the title of Chetubim, which appears to correspond to the Psalms of the New Testament.

EDWARD.

How long is this division known to have existed among the Jews?

MR. B.

Certainly for the last 1400 years, and probably long before the coming of our Lord, as in the prologue to the Wisdom of Jesus, the son of Sirach, we have this threefold division twice mentioned; first as *the Law, the Prophets, and other books of our fathers*; and, secondly, as *the Law, the Prophets, and the rest of the books*.

BEATRICE.

It seems reasonable, then, to conclude that the last-named books had not originally a fixed title, and therefore might be included by our Lord under the general expression of the Psalms.

MR. B.

But we have yet further evidence; for Philo and Josephus, who lived near the time of our Lord, likewise divide the Hebrew Scriptures in the same manner, giving to the two first classes the determinate titles of the *Law* and the *Prophets*, but

only describing the rest—Philo as containing Hymns, (*i. e.* Psalms) and other books by which knowledge and piety are promoted and described; Josephus as containing Hymns (or Psalms) to God, and instructions of life for man.

EDWARD.

So that, in fact, all the divisions seem to agree as to substance: do they agree in detail?

MR. B.

According to Josephus, there were five books in the first class, thirteen in the second, and four in the third; in all twenty-two. In the time of Jerome the whole number of books also amounted to twenty-two; but in our Bible there are thirty-nine.

BEATRICE.

Does not this overthrow the argument?

MR. B.

No; for it merely arises from different classifications, as we are informed by Jerome: for in his time the book of Ruth was appended to that of Judges, and that of Lamentations to Jeremiah; the two books of Samuel were united in one; similarly, the two books of Chronicles in one; the books of Ezra and Nehemiah in one; and the twelve minor prophets also united into one; so that the thirty-nine books of our time consti-

tuted, in fact, the twenty-two of Jerome and Josephus.

EDWARD.

Are there any other catalogues besides that of Jerome?

MR. B.

In the third century we have one by Origen, and in the second, one by Melito : we have also one in the Talmud.

BEATRICE.

But are the books of our Lord's time clearly identified with those of ours?

MR. B.

Josephus determines the books of the law and the Psalms, and has quoted all the books except those of Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Solomon's Song.

Philo has quoted all except those of Ruth, Chronicles, Nehemiah, Daniel, Lamentations, Esther, Ecclesiastes, and Canticles.

In the New Testament, all are quoted except Judges, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Ecclesiastes, and Canticles.

EDWARD.

But the non-existence of quotations does not establish the non-existence or want of authority in the books ; for it is very probable, from their subjects, that no quotations could be required

from the nature of the works in which the rest were quoted.

MR. B.

That our Lord had the same division of the Scriptures in view which Josephus had, cannot be doubted; that the books which Josephus had were the same as those of Jerome, is proved in a very satisfactory manner by Bishop Marsh; and that our books are the same as those of Jerome is certain. We may therefore conclude, that the books referred to by our Lord as having authority were neither more nor less than those which we now receive as canonical. This being also generally acknowledged, further proof seems unnecessary.

EDWARD.

But if the books are the same, how can we determine the integrity of these books?

MR. B.

The peculiar circumstances under which the Old Testament has been transmitted is sufficient security on this point. By the very nature of the books of Moses, as being the law of the land, as well as by the express commandment given at the time of their promulgation, the uncorrupted preservation of the first of the three great divisions of the Old Testament was secured.

“And Moses commanded them, saying, At the end of

every seven years, in the solemnity of the year of release, in the feast of tabernacles, when all Israel is come to appear before the Lord thy God in the place which he shall choose, thou shalt read this law before all Israel, in their hearing." — *Deut.* xxxi. 10, 11.

BEATRICE.

And was this command observed ?

MR. B.

We have every reason to believe it was: in various parts of the sacred writings we find mention made of the law as being the supreme authority; and from the time of Joshua to Nehemiah we find it appealed to in this manner.

EDWARD.

But was not the law altogether lost for a time ?

MR. B.

The particular copy of the law deposited in the Temple was found by Hilkiah, in the reign of Josiah, and therefore must have been secreted or lost during the idolatrous reigns of Manasseh and Amon; but at no other period are we aware of even this single copy having been missing; and its loss could not have affected the other copies which must have existed elsewhere, from the fact of its being the law of the land.

EDWARD.

Has it not been asserted, however, that it was wholly lost at the destruction of Jerusalem ?

MR. B.

It has, by those whose wishes outstripped their knowledge; for there is not the least pretext for the assertion beyond a passage in a notorious forgery, of which even the original text is now lost. But such assailants are in general willing to admit any thing as genuine, in order to prove the Scriptures not genuine, or any thing credible, to shew these books are not credible. From the writings of Ezra and Nehemiah we however are assured that the law was *not* lost, and we also know that before then Daniel had it in Babylon.

BEATRICE.

And have the other Scriptures been preserved in like manner?

MR. B.

We have reason to believe so, since we find the books of Joshua and Samuel placed with the law; and it seems natural to conclude, that the rest would be added in order.

BEATRICE.

But by whom were all collected and arranged as we have them now?

MR. B.

That was the work of Ezra, emphatically called "the scribe," and the president of a celebrated assembly, called "the Great Synagogue," when the

canon of the Old Testament was for ever fixed in the state in which we now have it.

EDWARD.

But some have supposed, that he wrote it all in fact, and that the accounts given to us were drawn up merely to give authority to his work.

MR. B.

This is another of those incredible hypotheses which are never wanting when the object is to invalidate the sacred volume. Neither Ezra nor any other man (unless by inspiration, which no Deist can suppose,) could write the various books in question, even if when written it had been possible to persuade the people of their genuineness. There is *internal* as well as *external* evidence for these books which cannot be set aside by *hypothesis*. Exclusively of our Lord's attestation to the authority of the Old Testament, its genuineness and credibility may from itself be shewn to be such as no labour now can overthrow, and still less the cavils of men ignorant of the language of the books they condemn. The positive external evidence in behalf of the Old Testament is in a great measure placed beyond our reach, for we have no contemporary authors to bear testimony to it; but that must not be imputed as a defect to these writings, which is only the defect of the age in which they were produced. Every other species of evi-

dence however we have, in a stronger degree than can be brought forward for writings, the authenticity of which no one would dispute. In the Old Testament we perceive a gradation in the language, such as may be naturally accounted for, on the supposition of these books being produced in a long course of ages, but on no other ; we perceive a difference in the style of the various authors, such as it is wholly incredible that any forger could produce. It is a very easy thing to make the supposition of forgery ; but it would be found no easy task to imitate the writings of any one, either Moses, David, Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, or Ezekiel ; and as to Ezra producing *all* these, and many more, it is mere mockery to entertain the idea for a moment.

EDWARD.

But we may not assume the integrity of the Old Testament to prove its genuineness.

MR. B.

We may not, and all that has hitherto been said need only be regarded as illustrative of the care which the Jews took of their sacred writings. We know from external evidence the existence of these writings up to the time of Ezra. From the writers of the New Testament, Josephus, and indeed every Jewish author, we know the scrupulous regard they have ever paid to the uncorrupted preservation of these books : the books themselves, as

now existing, are a sufficient proof of their honesty; for they contain passages which are destructive of Judaism itself in its present state, and from which the people whom they most have hated, draw their strongest arguments. We are secured by numerous manuscripts, by quotations, by versions, by commentaries, and by the disputes of contending parties, from imposition up to the time of our Lord; and even beyond his time, by the Greek version, known by the name of the Septuagint.

BEATRICE.

But our Lord's authority alone will be sufficient to the Christian. He accused the Jews of many things, but not of having corrupted the word of God.

MR. B.

And even to others also the testimony of our Lord and his apostles to the Scriptures of the Old Testament are important, as being that of those who were especially opposed to the prevailing follies and vices of that nation. If the miracles of our Lord had not been real, his testimony would still have been important, though not conclusive, on the subject; and all the difficulties connected with the rejection of the Old Testament press alike upon the Christian and the Deist. The Christian is bound by the fact of the integrity of the Old Testament, to defend it as far as it was connected with his religion by the founder of that religion.

The infidel is bound by the same fact to account for the difficulties into which it brings him. The first is bound to believe these records genuine and authentic, on the authority of his Lord and Master: the second is bound to disprove the evidence of their being genuine and authentic, both as attested by the divine mission of Christ, and by the evidence which is more exclusively their own, and which equally existed before the appearance of Christ. To those who deem the evidence already adduced in behalf of the miracles of our Lord conclusive, no further proof is indeed requisite; but as some may not, I will now shew you how the argument may be conducted independently of this; and thereby through the means of these writings additional evidence be brought to prove the miracles of our Lord real.

EDWARD.

The Christian is not, however, bound to do this, since the evidence in favour of the miracles of our Lord ought to be sufficient.

MR. B.

He is not, nor do I consider, even in the course now to be pursued, myself bound to prove every thing which a Jew might justly urge in behalf of the Old Testament. All that it appears to me necessary to shew is, that the books which involve most closely the truth of the Mosaic revelation, and that of our Lord, are certainly genuine, and

that the rest cannot be proved spurious, and that both are credible. But if in any respects length of time may have weakened the proof, you must still bear in mind that the proof is rather that which might have been required to be produced previously to the coming of Christ, when its weight must have been greater.

BEATRICE.

But is it not necessary to this, that we be assured that we have the sacred text as near as possible to that published by Ezra ?

MR. B.

It is, and for that purpose the most careful investigations have been made at great expense, and the most laborious examination of manuscripts has taken place.

EDWARD.

The Jews also have taken great pains, I believe, to ascertain the true text.

MR. B.

They have long ago, and their superstitious reverence of it has been of the greatest use in this respect. They have numbered the sentences, words, and letters, in such a variety of ways, and have so noted down every minute circumstance connected with it, that we are certain, that no very material omission or addition has been made. In the very

copying of it they are also so scrupulous, that we are enabled to rely on them to a great degree. The Septuagint, from its having been made not long after the time of Ezra, is also of great importance, and has in like manner been critically revised. In short, no means of ascertaining the truth have been left untried, and from the labours of Kennicott in England, and De Rossi in Italy, we are enabled to rely upon a Hebrew text sufficiently accurate for all the purposes of an inquiry into its genuineness and credibility; as similarly from the labours of the Masorites we ascertain the opinion of the Jews on the sacred text, and from those of Holmes we can argue from the testimony of a critically correct copy of the Septuagint.

EDWARD.

We then argue from the text thus ascertained, believing it to be sufficiently near that of Ezra for the purposes of inquiry; and to that we are limited, having no external testimony to it beyond that period.

MR. B.

These books, then, profess to be by various authors, the names of some being well known in the East, whilst with others we are only acquainted through the medium of this volume. Now that Moses and Solomon, the son of David, lived and wrote is certain, from the concurrent testimony of all the nations near Palestine; that the people of Israel

were led out of Egypt by the former, and that the latter raised that nation to their greatest height of prosperity, cannot be disputed on any reasonable grounds. The question is, are the writings ascribed to Moses and Solomon theirs or not? That it is highly probable they are, appears from the following considerations:

The language, style, and tenour of them, are such as might have been expected.

The most minute examination cannot prove any thing inconsistent with such a supposition.

The nature of these writings is such as excludes, in a great measure, the possibility of imposition.

The obedience of a nation to them, and the tacit concurrence of neighbouring nations in the fact, give us all the external proof that the nature of the case will admit.

And every other hypothesis is attended with insuperable difficulties.

EDWARD.

The testimony of the learned, with regard to the language and style, must be allowed, since no contrary evidence can be produced; but does not the mention of the death of Moses, and the occurrence in the Pentateuch of names not used in his time, militate against the second position?

MR. B.

There can be no doubt that the last chapter of

Deuteronomy is a conclusion which the subject required, and as such was added by Joshua, Samuel, or Ezra. If language was used in general such as could not have been used in the time of Moses, it would strongly have militated against the genuineness of his writings; but the mere alteration of a name, which had been forgotten, to the one which afterwards became common, and manifestly done by a later writer to make the narrative intelligible, cannot affect the authority of the work at large.

BEATRICE.

But does not historical fact invalidate these writings?

MR. B.

If the writings assigned to Solomon be admitted, and how they can be denied I cannot see, those ascribed to Moses must be long anterior to any other history extant; and both on this account, and from reference to the country in which it was produced, far more likely to be true than any other record which has come down to us. If, therefore, there were a difference of statement as to historical fact, this record, whether spurious or genuine, as the more ancient, and as produced in the countries where the truth could be best ascertained, has the first claims. Greece and Italy were then in a state of barbarism, and probably Asia Minor also. The two great kingdoms were those of Assyria and Egypt. From the former, undoubtedly, came

Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation, and from the latter came Moses. Palestine was the great medium of communication between the two, and in the state in which society then was, from all the accounts transmitted to us of Abraham, Moses, and their descendants, from no other source was a true history more likely to proceed; and to compare the authority of writers who lived from 1000 to 1500 years subsequently to the period in question against a document produced at that period, a document also which, from its very nature, must have adhered to truth in common facts, appears to me as absurd a method of procedure as any well can be.

BEATRICE.

The statements of the Pentateuch differ, then, from those of other writers?

MR. B.

In some things they do; but in many they agree. Now the latter certainly confirms the authority of the Pentateuch, whereas the former can never invalidate it; for if no question of religion were involved, the statements of the Greeks and Romans, even taking their own accounts in the most favourable manner, could not admit of competition with those of an author living at a much earlier period, and in the very countries, the history of which is the subject of dispute. In two excellent works of Dr. Gray, the "*Key to the Old Tes-*

tament," and "*The Connexion of Sacred and Profane Literature*," you will find nearly all that you can desire to know, relating to the elucidation of the Old Testament, and to these works I would refer you in general; and it is indeed necessary that you should read these or some works of a similar kind, that you may know the *facts* of the case, and be aware how grossly the Old Testament is commonly misrepresented by the opponents of Christianity. You will find, I think, also, that *no historical* fact, asserted in this volume, has been disproved from the nature of the case, or contradictory statements in different parts; and when you consider that in many most important points the Scripture account is fully confirmed, you will perceive that the credibility of the whole, as to historical accuracy, is most probable, and consequently the genuineness of the records. We cannot, indeed, in general argue from the truth of the contents of a book to its genuineness, nor, on the other hand, from its spuriousness to its incredibility; but in the case of most of these books the evidence for the genuineness is evidence for the credibility also, and more particularly in the case of the Pentateuch, there appears no possible reason why we should run counter to the general belief of the East in denying either the facts or the author.

EDWARD.

If the general credibility of the Pentateuch be

admitted, it would seem arguing merely for the sake of objecting to deny the author to be Moses. But does not the miraculous part of the narrative lay us under a necessity of rejecting it?

MR. B.

By no means; for whenever the narrative was published, the same insuperable difficulties would attach to its reception on any other supposition than that of its genuineness and authority. For the Pentateuch itself supposes observances to be kept up in remembrance of these miracles, which observances must, therefore, have existed, or these writings could not, in the nature of things, have become the law of the people. If no Pass-over was kept, no account, of course, could be given of its origin: if it was kept, no account, involving heavy duties, could be admitted by a whole nation, but that which they knew to be correct.

BEATRICE.

But may not false accounts, the publication of which is removed at a great distance of time from the date of the events themselves, prevail?

MR. B.

Not in the case where they bind to a severe law, for which no equivalent is given, no reason assigned, but as connected with the truth of those accounts. In this case also you have not a great

distance of time to help you ; for the writings ascribed to Moses could not have been produced long after the time in which he lived, and the law refers to the miracles as having taken place before the eyes of his contemporaries. You will find Leslie's Rules, as applied to the miracles of the Pentateuch, of great effect. If, again, any interval had elapsed after which a good opportunity might be afforded of bringing forward the Pentateuch, and ascribing it to Moses, of laying hold of customs, and accounting for their observance by a relation of miracles, you must suppose the author of such an attempt would only inculcate what he was certain would be well received. Now I venture to assert, that from all that we know of human nature, from all that we know of history, and from all that we can collect as to this particular people, the Pentateuch never could have been so forced upon the people as a law of absolute authority ; to say nothing of the incredibility of inventing such a law, which confined national and personal ambition within such narrow limits.

EDWARD.

If the Jewish law was not of divine origin, the people were cruelly deceived.

MR. B.

It is incredible that they would have permitted themselves to be cruelly deceived. In what other

instance was ever such severe legislation effected ? What other instance can be produced of a people thus imposed upon ?

BEATRICE.

But the Jews are a very peculiar people.

MR. B.

So they have become ; but we do not observe in the history of the Jews, more than any other race, a disposition to confine themselves within a narrow tract of land ; to deny themselves ; to submit to a severe round of duty ; to live by faith rather than by sight. Some motive or other must have given rise to so extraordinary an attempt as the legislation of the Pentateuch ; but what motive could produce it, in case a divine origin be not admitted, is not easy to conjecture. If this legislation were *human*, unquestionably its author was a man of the very highest intellect ; but how such a man could trust to a perpetual miracle, is what no ingenuity can solve. He puts the nation under a peculiar providence, and binds it to the observance of these laws, under the penalty of ruin if they forsake them.

EDWARD.

Then you regard the Jews as, in some measure, supported by a continued miracle ; or that there must have been a continuance of particular provi-

dential agency to have supported their peculiar establishment?

MR. B.

Such there undoubtedly *was*, according to the sacred records ; and such there *must have been*, to enable them to observe the law originally given.

EDWARD.

This is assuming a great deal.

MR. B.

Not more than what a strict adherence to truth requires, and not more than the subject will bear : it cannot be disproved.

EDWARD.

Neither can it be proved ; and belief in a continual interposition of Divine Providence is more than ought to be required without proof.

MR. B.

I am willing to own that the whole, as a deviation from the usual course of things, requires more proof than it would had it been accordant therewith. I am willing also to grant that the period is too remote for me to bring positive proof ; but, on the other hand, the fact of any one miracle being established, no reason can be assigned why fifty others, connected with it, may not also be true, provided the general object of their perform-

ance be the same. If the children of Israel were miraculously brought out of Egypt for a particular purpose, no reason can be given against the alleged fact of their having been miraculously preserved in Canaan for the same purpose. We cannot determine either one way or the other, as in a matter of demonstration; but the assumption made by the author of the Pentateuch is, to me, a strong argument for its genuineness and credibility.

BEATRICE.

But is the assumption so decided?

MR. B.

The following passages will determine:—

“And the Lord spake unto Moses in Mount Sinai, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye come into the land which I give you, then shall the land keep a sabbath unto the Lord. Six years thou shalt sow thy field, and six years thou shalt prune thy vineyard, and gather in the fruit thereof; but in the seventh year shall be a sabbath of rest unto the land, a sabbath for the Lord: thou shalt neither sow thy field nor prune thy vineyard. That which groweth of its own accord of thy harvest thou shalt not reap, neither gather the grapes of thy vine undressed: for it is a year of rest unto the land.”—

Lev. xxv. 1—5.

A similar command is then given relative to the observance of the jubilee of the fiftieth year, and the divine authority of the command is put upon the following interposition of Providence:—

“And if ye shall say, What shall we eat the seventh year?

behold, we shall not sow, nor gather in our increase: *Then I will command my blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall bring forth fruit for three years.* And ye shall sow the eighth year, and eat yet of old fruit until the ninth year; until her fruits come in ye shall eat of the old store.”—*Lev. xxv. 20—22.*

EDWARD.

But a daring profession of this kind is not inconsistent with the idea of imposture; for Mahomet sent forth the Koran as a miracle, and many others have made similar pretensions.

MR. B.

You cannot, however, I think, bring forward any instance of a religion being placed upon a footing similar to this. The pretended miracles which at various times have been offered or promised by pretenders to divine communications were of a very different character to this; nor am I aware of any instance in which the faith of those who professed to believe in them was put to such a *test* as this. It is not easy to conceive of any miracle that could more clearly establish the identity of Him who spoke unto Moses with the Creator and Governor of the world, or which spoke so immediately to the comprehension of all, “The Lord he is God; the Lord he is God.” Nor can it be supposed that any one but Moses ever would have used such a declaration; for not only is the observance of this command connected with a promise, but the non-

observance of it with a curse. Of the fact of its observance or non-observance, and of the fulfilment of that promise or that curse, all were equally able to judge ; and therefore it cannot be imagined that any one would, after the time of Moses, produce a law couched in terms that must have been its own destruction.

BEATRICE.

Any person possessed of sufficient talents to forge a code of laws, like those in the Pentateuch, would never have exposed the whole to such a test, at once so unnecessary and so fatal to imposture.

MR. B.

This is also not the only test of the same kind ; but we have not time to consider more ; and the Pentateuch itself will afford the best proofs of its genuineness. But, again, if the Pentateuch be not genuine, the other Scriptures which refer to it cannot be genuine ; and if no part of the Old Testament, ascribed to authors before the time of Ezra, be genuine, by whom could they have been composed ? Certainly not by any one individual, nor yet by any number of contemporaries acting in concert, the internal evidence being most decisively against either supposition ; but if these books were written in different ages, and yet are all spurious, we are compelled to acknowledge a *miracle* for no purpose against them, in order to escape the ac-

knowledgment of much more reasonable miracles contained in them.

BEATRICE.

The supposition of imposture seems attended with insuperable difficulties, as connected with the authors of these books, both with reference to their authenticity and credibility.

MR. B.

And their reception by the Jews only involves still more difficulties. In defence of this volume, and the faith they build upon it, what have they not suffered ! yet, look at its contents, and where is the ground of attachment, if any doubt had ever existed among them as to its truth ? What generation would ever have taken up such a yoke of bondage, had it been unknown to their fathers, or destitute of the evidence of miracles ? What could induce them to continue to hold in veneration records so disgraceful to them, but a conviction that their origin was such as is alleged ?

EDWARD.

I do not think *their* belief in the Old Testament has ever been seriously questioned ; but this is only *their* belief.

MR. B.

Still of how great force is the belief of a nation

situated as they have been in a matter of this nature? If it cannot be proved that these writings are spurious, how can the argument, derived both from external and internal evidence, be evaded? The unbelief of other nations cannot make void belief so attested as theirs has been. We have no coeval testimony against the Old Testament. We have no internal evidence involving absurdity or impossibility. Many of the authors of these books probably little anticipated the scrutiny they would undergo, and even the latest period which could be assigned for their production was not that in which works would appear which would stand the test of ages. The religion of the Old Testament is such as no other country ever has produced where that was unknown. It has always been the great delight of infidels to despise the country, and ridicule the people, whence these records have proceeded; apparently forgetful that the more contempt they heap upon this nation, the more difficult it becomes to account for their works.

CONVERSATION XIV.

MR. B.

WE have hitherto considered the evidences for the Old and New Testaments separate from each other, and in either case found the strongest probability for the truth of each. By connecting them, we shall increase those probabilities to a degree amounting so near to certainty, that it is only exceeded by mathematical demonstration.

BEATRICE.

By what means do you effect this?

MR. B.

By shewing that the whole Bible only contains a succession of revelations connected with various dispensations, of which each was designed to be preparatory for that which was to follow ; so that the Old Testament is completed and perfected in the New, to which it formed a necessary introduction.

EDWARD.

This merely depends, then, upon the history of the Bible?

MR. B.

The Scriptures are of course our only guide, and since at present we have every reason to be-

lieve they are from God, we must follow their leading implicitly. The knowledge of the great Creator of all things, which may be derived from observation on his works, is of course very limited; nor can the experience of mankind, as to his providence, add much. We “believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” As we do not perceive any fixed law of reward in this life, we hope for it in another state of being, to which we appear to be fast hastening, for which this present state seems only preparatory, and which is to us, therefore, of the utmost importance.

EDWARD.

From the Scriptures we learn that these opinions are just, so that we may proceed safely, being at least so far agreed.

MR. B.

From the Scriptures we also learn many things which otherwise we could not have known, and of a nature to prove the *necessity* of a divine revelation, as well as its expediency.

BEATRICE.

But these we only admit on the authority of Scripture, having no further testimony to them.

MR. B.

Not exactly so: even to these additional statements, the certainty as well as the knowledge of

which we owe to Scripture alone, general experience bears some testimony, though not sufficient of itself to establish any thing. From the attributes of the Creator, we conclude his creation must have been originally "very good," which the Scripture confirms. From the present state of the world we conclude, that evil has been introduced into it; but further than this we cannot go. It is the Scripture alone that can explain to us how it was that, though "God made man upright," the creature has so far departed from his Creator.

EDWARD.

But is the Scripture account of the fall of man from a state of original purity to be received literally?

MR. B.

Upon this subject various opinions have been entertained; but I confess I am unable to perceive any trace in the Bible itself of any other than a literal interpretation. The Bible unquestionably, when its evidences are called in question, must be allowed to be its own interpreter, let the consequences be what they may. I would reject, therefore, altogether, any attempt to accommodate the language of Scripture to the wishes of those to whom it may be addressed. Whatsoever is contained therein is either contrary to fact and possibility, or not: if the former, the whole must be rejected; if the latter, it must be retained, in con-

sequence of the probability already shewn that it is from God; for however great the witness of man may be, "the witness of God is greater."

BEATRICE.

What other interpretation than a literal one has there ever been brought forward?

MR. B.

The enemies of Christianity have attempted to overthrow some branches of its evidences, by resorting to a figurative or allegorical interpretation; and some of its friends have likewise had recourse to the same aid, in order to defend particular parts which have excited the strongest efforts on the parts of their adversaries. It ought not, however, to be asked, "How can the question be most readily decided either way?" but, "What decision do the Scriptures themselves give?" If they rest their claims upon a foundation which will not support them, from that very fact they are overthrown; but if they rely upon a defence which will indeed support them, though not in the way we should have expected, nevertheless, since by that defence they stand, and their authority is established, by that defence we must abide also, in preference to any other which to us might have appeared better. Now, the narrative of the fall of man is given without any intimation of allegory; it is alluded to in various parts of the

sacred volume as fact, is argued upon as such, and therefore as such must be received.

EDWARD.

But this exposes Christianity to greater danger, does it not ?

MR. B.

To no danger which it is not able to overcome ; but even were this not the case, in inquiring into the truth of the religion itself, we have no right to make conclusions, merely with reference to its advantage.

Connected with the fall of man we find the first of a series of promises made by the Creator to mankind, of a future salvation from the fatal consequences of that fall, the promise, unconnected with those that followed it, more calculated to give hope than information. In a succession of revelations afterwards made, we find this promise confirmed, the manner of its fulfilment shadowed out, and the consequences enlarged upon. Again, we find the whole of the dispensations of the great Governor of the world conducted with reference to its fulfilment. When the wickedness of man became so great on the earth that the most terrible destruction swept away its inhabitants, one family was spared to preserve the human race alive. When a second general corruption of mankind was taking place, one family was again severed from the rest to preserve the knowledge of the true God. Through

a long course of time the descendants of that house were prepared by a necessary discipline for the accomplishment of the promise. They were separated, as a nation, from the rest of the world ; were placed under a special providence ; were commanded to observe a law which was designed to teach the nature and importance of the salvation hereafter to be revealed ; and were made, unconsciously, the means of preserving the strongest proofs of the reality of the fulfilment of the great promise. Connected with that promise, as again and again confirmed by holy men of God, were now added a vast number of prophecies, the design of which was to fix unequivocally the truth of its accomplishment, or to develope important facts more or less connected with it.

BEATRICE.

You will bring in, then, the aid of prophecy at last : it has surprised me that you have not made use of it before.

MR. B.

Thus the whole of the Old Testament is preparatory to some greater dispensation which was to follow. The Christian asserts, that the New Testament contains that better covenant ; that the salvation has been wrought ; that the Jewish dispensation is superseded ; and that no other revelation will be given from heaven till the consum-

mation of all things : that nevertheless all is now regulated with reference to the Gospel of Christ, and of this we are to have confirmation in the fulfilment of prophecy, and in the enduring nature and excellency of his religion.

EDWARD.

But many of these particulars require proof: some formidable objections lie against the conclusion; and a single false declaration, which professes to be of divine origin, overthrows the whole.

MR. B.

For the establishment of the general outline which I have given, the whole Bible itself is necessary; and here it seems proper to insist upon the necessity of every one, disposed to be sceptical on the subject, taking the trouble of giving the whole Bible at least one serious reading from beginning to end, before he decide against it. Every one able to do it, ought to read it in the original languages; but where this cannot be done, certainly no inquirer into truth should suffer himself to be prejudiced against any part, till he is certain that no error exists in the translation, and that he understands that translation aright.

BEATRICE.

But how can this be done?

MR. B.

For common use, there are the works of many learned men in English, in addition to our excellent translation, which may easily be referred to, and whence a pretty correct idea of the whole may be obtained. In the very useful and cheap edition of the Bible, with notes from our best divines, which is circulated by the Society for promoting Christian Knowledge, much instruction is compressed in a little compass, and a great deal of collateral information afforded, with reference to the best authors. To Mr. Townshend we are indebted for an edition of the Bible arranged chronologically, which, to the advantage of retaining the words of our authorised translation, has also that of abundant illustration, not to be obtained on any other plan. But where these books cannot be obtained, even the commonest Bible, with marginal references, when well read, will perhaps do more to confirm the faith of the believer than the best defence of Christianity extant.

EDWARD.

In asserting the literal interpretation of Scripture, is it meant that every expression should be understood literally?

MR. B.

Certainly not, where the nature of the language or customs of the people had established the application of one set of words to ideas be-

yond the literal meaning of the words. By objecting to any other than the plain and direct interpretation of Scripture, my only object is to secure that meaning which the sacred writers meant to convey, and the sense in which one understood another. If what they wrote had been written and received as figurative or allegorical, as such I would receive it in examining their claims; but when the sense conveys no other than a simple relation of facts, as such only can I understand it.

EDWARD.

But if uncertainty as to the interpretation of prophecy exist, as I have heard it affirmed, no certain conclusions can be drawn from it; and if the writers of the New Testament understood the language of the Old in a different sense to that in which others do, who is to decide the question?

MR. B.

The interpretation of prophecy is a subject which at all times requires peculiar caution; for by the very nature of the language in which they are couched, the prophecies are frequently made only intelligible by the event; and where the fulfilment of the prophecy as well as the prediction takes place at a period greatly removed from the age in which we live, it is not surprising that some degree of obscurity should rest upon them.

EDWARD.

Is not this in favour of my objection? An obscure revelation is almost equivalent to no revelation at all.

MR. B.

There is no obscurity in those parts of the Scriptures which are given as express revelations of the will of God, by which we are to govern our conduct. With regard to the obscurity attendant upon prophecy, the nature of the subject, in some measure, explains it. If the Old Testament had presented a full delineation of the future, in cases where no immediate exertion of divine power was requisite, the fulfilment might have been imputed to design on the part of man, and the evidence of its divine origin thus obscured, if not destroyed. It was necessary so to present the future, as to show that all was foreseen, but that the prophecy should not be the cause of its own fulfilment. In points where no *human power* could fulfil the prediction, we find the declarations decisive, and developed to a very great extent.

BEATRICE.

Such I recollect is the case with regard to Isaiah's predictions of the birth of the Messiah, and of the miracles which were to be wrought at his coming.

MR. B.

And even where supernatural agency was not

requisite to fulfil the prophecy, we sometimes find very detailed and accurate delineations, but principally in cases where the least possible chance existed for a fulfilment arising from design, as in the circumstantial detail of the nature of the death and burial of the Messiah.

BEATRICE.

In both these classes of predictions there is no appearance of any thing but a *literal* fulfilment being intended; and a literal fulfilment certainly took place, according to the New Testament.

MR. B.

We can also produce a sufficient number of prophecies, on which no *difference* of opinion has existed between the Jews who lived previously to the time of our Lord, or his contemporaries, and the writers of the New Testament: with regard to others, we can certainly prove the interpretation of later times adopted by the Jews false and absurd; and in general can satisfactorily account for any difference of opinion between us and them. You will observe also, that with regard to the Jews, to whom the argument from prophecy was first addressed,

“ Their agreement, where we have records, is a good presumption that in the rest, where records are deficient, they were also with us in the sense of those Scriptures; to which the numbers of Jews converted to the Gospel by virtue of such

Scripture testimonies gives an additional strength. For it cannot be thought by any but sceptics, that such numbers of all degrees of Jews, at that time learned, rulers, priests, scribes, of all sects, men by their profession and station obliged to know the Scriptures, should forsake the religion they were most tenacious of, upon the authority of texts that made nothing for the religion they went over to, or were evidently against it, without prospect of worldly advantage, to the certain hazard of their lives, yea, and of God's favour too after death (which they hoped for), did not they act sincerely. Fancy as you will a weakness or enthusiasm in those that set about converting the Jews in the method of *impertinent citations*; their weakness could not make their proofs strong, nor infuse credulity into men *certainly qualified to judge of their proofs, as having the Old and New Testament in their hands*, and who, after comparing them together, did yet assent to the truth of their reasoning, and became disciples."

BEATRICE.

Whose observations are these?

MR. B.

They occur in the Introduction of Bishop Chandler's Defence of Christianity, from the Prophecies of the Old Testament; a work of great value, from the profound rabbinical learning of the author. In this work he undertakes to prove the following positions:—

" 1. That there was a general expectation of a Messias to come at the time that our Lord Jesus Christ appeared; which was the tradition of their ancestors from the ages before that up to the age next to the prophets themselves.

" 2. To support this expectation, there were in their Scrip-

tures express literal prophecies that singly concerned the Messiah.

“ 3. They had also typical prophecies to the same effect, the literal meaning of which was intended to be applied to the Messias.

“ 4. The exceptions taken to some texts, cited from the Old in the New Testament, are frivolous, and ought to cast no discredit on the Gospel wherein they are found.

“ 5. The allegoric or other methods of citing and explaining Scripture, which the Jews were accustomed to, though different from the manner of arguing which the later ages have confined themselves to, might justly be followed, as it is sometimes by the writers of the New Testament, according to the allowed maxims of disputation, in reasoning with Jews; or, in other words, the apostles deserve no censure for using arguments *ad hominem*.

“ 6. The sense fixed by Christ and his apostles on the prophecies of the Old Testament, supposing many of those prophecies capable of suiting other persons and times than those of the Messias, is certainly preferred to any other sense they may possibly be taken in.”—*CHAND. Int.* p. 16.

These positions are, I think, satisfactorily established by the learned and candid author, and you will find the whole of his proofs well deserving of attention. I have read few books on the prophecies with equal satisfaction.

EDWARD.

What prophecies does he adduce as certainly and exclusively relating to the Messias?

MR. B.

He selects the following as *immediately and*

solely in the obvious and literal sense, according to scholastic rules, referring to him.

“ 1. Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me : and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in : behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts.—*Mal.* iii. 1. p. 52.

“ 2. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord : and he shall turn the hearts of the fathers to (*or with*) the children, and the heart of the children to (*or with*) the fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.—*Mal.* iv. 5, 6, p. 64.

“ 3. For thus saith the Lord of hosts, yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land ; and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come : and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former ; and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts.—*Hag.* ii. 6—9, p. 71.

“ 4. Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion ; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem ; behold, thy King cometh unto thee ; the righteous one, and that Saviour, lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass.—*Zech.* ix. 9, p. 84.

“ 5. And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and supplications ; and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born.—*Zech.* xii. 10, p. 88.

“ 6. And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed : and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand

for ever. Forasmuch as thou sawest, that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold.—*Dan. ii. 44, 45, p. 95.*

“ 7. I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him : his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom shall not be destroyed.—*Dan. vii. 13, 14, p. 106.*

“ 8. Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, to seal up sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy. Know, therefore, and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to build Jerusalem again unto Messiah the prince, shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks : the streets shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, and they shall not be his (people) : and the people of the prince that shall come, shall destroy the city and the sanctuary ; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and at the end of the war desolations are determined. And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week ; and in one part of that week he shall cause the sacrifice and oblation to cease ; and upon the battlement shall be the idols of the desolator until the consummation, viz. of *God's wrath*, and that determined, shall be poured upon the desolator.—*Dan. ix. 24—27, p. 109.*

“ 9. But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel ; whose goings forth have been of old, from everlasting.—*Mic. v. 2, p. 124.*

“ 10. For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it (*or he*) shall speak, and not lie. Though he tarry, wait for him.— *Hab.* ii. 3, 4, p. 132.

“ 11. In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the Lord that doth this.— *Amos*, ix. 11, 12, p. 139.

“ 12. Behold, my servant shall prosper; he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high. As many were astonished at thee; (his visage was so marred, more than any other man, and his form more than the sons of men;) so shall he sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him: for that which was not told them shall they see, and that which they had not heard shall they consider. Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? For he shall grow up as a tender plant before him, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: as a hiding of faces from us, he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows, *when* we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed. All we, like sheep, have gone astray; we have turned back every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid upon him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed (*or rather* the debt was demanded) and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth. He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter; and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth. He was taken off *by authority*, and by judgment, and who shall declare his generation (*or lineage*)? when he shall be cut off from the land of the living, and for the transgression of my people stricken. And he

(the people) made his grave with the wicked ; but it shall be with the rich after his death ; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased God to bruise him : he hath put him to grief : if he shall make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, that shall prolong their days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hands. Because of the travail of his soul, he shall see his desire, and be satisfied : by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many, whose iniquities he shall bear. Therefore will I divide him a portion of the great, and he shall divide the spoil of the strong ; because he hath poured out his soul unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors, and bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.— *Isaiah*, lii. 13, &c. p. 147.

Now if Jesus of Nazareth be not the Messiah, every one of these prophecies has proved false ; if he be, every one has been accomplished. Their integrity, their interpretation, their application to the Messias, and him alone, are certain, as Bishop Chandler shews at large. They limit the time and place of his birth, and of his death ; they shew the circumstances which were to precede his coming, those which would attend his life, and those which follow his death ; and by all the testimony we can collect upon the subject, in every particular have these prophecies been fulfilled ; for our Lord did appear in the second Temple, was preceded by John the Baptist in the spirit and power of Elias, and did enter Jerusalem in the manner predicted. He was born at Bethlehem ; he was pierced and cut off at Jerusalem, at the time appointed ; Jerusalem was made desolate, and the kingdom of Jesus was

established, has continued to this day, and continually advances in every part of the globe.

EDWARD.

The collected force of this is indeed very great ; for the evidence is unexceptionable, the prophecies being in the hands of enemies, and their fulfilment matter of fact known unto all, as we before ascertained.

MR. B.

And of these facts these very prophecies form a most irresistible confirmation ; for *from the beginning the facts were alleged as fulfilments of the prophecies*, and yet neither the one nor the other could be denied. But if these are acknowledged, who will deny the application of the other prophecies to our Lord ? Who can doubt that of him alone David wrote, when he said, “ *They pierced my hands and my feet ; they stand staring and looking upon me : they parted my garments among them, and for my vesture they cast lots :—all they that see me laugh me to scorn : they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him ; let him deliver him, seeing he delighteth in him :—they gave me also gall for my meat, and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink ?* ”

BEATRICE.

All those beautiful and affecting Psalms become

of infinitely greater importance and interest when thus explained by the event.

MR. B.

Of whom also but our Lord did the Psalmist write, when he rejoiced that “*his soul would not be left in hell;*” and that the Lord would “*not suffer his Holy One to see corruption?*” Whose triumph did he celebrate, if not that of the risen Son of God, in the words, “*Thou hast ascended up on high—thou hast led captivity captive; thou hast received gifts for men, even for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them?*” We have in the testimony of prophecy to our Lord, not the agreement of a few particulars, or the accomplishment of vague and indeterminate predictions; but the prophecies are such as could not possibly be foreseen by human knowledge, such as could not possibly be fulfilled by human artifice: in detail they are unexceptionable, and in the mass irresistible.

CONVERSATION XV.

EDWARD.

THE prophecies you brought forward in our last conversation have so strongly impressed my mind with the certainty of the argument thence derived in favour of the divine origin of the Scriptures, that I should conceive their evidence irresistible, had I not heard that the interpretation of the prophecies was very doubtful in all cases, and that many eminent men had given up the arguments derived from them.

MR. B.

That some eminent men may have doubted respecting them may be true ; but this proves little, for the majority have acknowledged the force of the argument. Those who have studied the subject of the prophecies most carefully have generally been the most zealous advocates.

BEATRICE.

But there may be something in the subject calculated to carry away the mind from fact to supposition ; and those who have studied this subject most, perhaps have not given decided proofs of their acuteness in others.

MR. B.

In making this assertion, you are falling into the very fault you condemn; for the *facts* of the case are altogether against your *hypothesis*. Bacon, Newton, and Warburton, names not easily equalled, stand pre-eminent among the advocates for prophecy. Yet of these, the first most strenuously recommends the study of it, as calculated to throw light upon history; the second himself wrote upon it; and the last founded a lecture, for the purpose of keeping the public attention fixed upon it, and calling forth the labours of the learned in its elucidation.

EDWARD.

Was there not a Bishop Newton, who wrote upon the prophecies, as well as Sir Isaac?

MR. B.

Bishop Newton's work is one of the most useful books which we have upon the subject, and is not less interesting in itself than important for the immense body of proof which it contains. He takes the prophecies in chronological order, and brings forward such a number of testimonies to their fulfilment, from profane as well as sacred authors, that little more need be desired on the subject.

EDWARD.

But has it not been conjectured, that some of the prophecies must have been written after the events, from the accuracy of the fulfilment?

MR. B.

Porphyry maintained an opinion of this kind with regard to the book of Daniel. He found no difficulty in applying it to the historical events which had occurred; but, being determined to reject the conclusion to which this agreement would naturally lead, he argued that it must have been written subsequently; whereas, there is nothing more certain than that the book was in existence prior to the events in question.

BEATRICE.

His opposition has then become advantageous to the cause which he sought to overthrow?

MR. B.

In this case, as in the arguments of Celsus against the miracles of our Lord, the evidence of our adversaries is of the greatest consequence, as proving the facts; for it is not very difficult to overthrow their false reasoning.

EDWARD.

What other prophecies are generally brought forward in defence of the Scriptures, besides those relating to our Lord Jesus Christ?

MR. B.

They are principally those relative to the Jews, those relative to the Christian church, and those relative to the destruction of great cities and em-

pires more immediately connected with the Jewish or Christian dispensation. There are some others of a more general nature also highly interesting, and some, on which considerable obscurity now rests, of less importance, but still deserving of attention. The prophecies which predict the dispersion of the Jews are peculiarly interesting, as their fulfilment is yet before our eyes; and those which have reference to the destruction of Jerusalem are scarcely less so, as the historical evidence is so full and explicit that there is no denying the facts. Nothing had occurred in the history of mankind, before the time of Moses, that could suggest such singular denunciations as those contained in the twenty-eighth chapter of the book of Deuteronomy; and we have no instance in later times of any thing bearing any analogy to the singular condition in which the Jews have been placed. Human foresight could not have predicted the event: human policy could not have fulfilled the prophecy.

BEATRICE.

I believe the condition of the Jews, scattered among all nations, has always been regarded as one of the greatest difficulties connected with scepticism.

MR. B.

The prophecies relative to the Christian church are only in part accomplished, and therefore we can

only partially argue from them. There are, however, some so decided, that it is not easy to escape the conclusion as to the divine origin of the writings in which they are found.

“ Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.”—1 *Tim.* iv. 1—3.

EDWARD.

No one, I think, can doubt the accomplishment of this prophecy who is not personally interested in denying its application.

MR. B.

Equally certain are the prophecies relative to the destruction of cities of the East; for though it might be that a person should be able to foresee the temporary ruin of a place, yet it is beyond all calculation of chances that he should foretell the precise nature of their destruction, and especially point out the cases where no restoration should take place. That Nineveh, Babylon, and Tyre once attracted the attention of the world as its first cities, is as certain as any historical fact can be; that the predictions of their *utter and continued desolation* were made at a time when they thus existed in splendour, is not less so; and

that they have been, and to this day are, totally ruined, is a well-known fact.

BEATRICE.

It appears altogether beyond human foresight to predict events like these.

EDWARD.

And certainly no human power could *secure* the accomplishment of such prophecies.

MR. B.

If then, in cases like these, we have *positive proof* of the fulfilment of prophecy, it cannot be rational to reject the testimony of history, when it records the fulfilment of other events, where we can have no other proof than that which history affords. In this also we do not ask the testimony of friends, but of enemies: let the Pagan and Jewish historians give their own accounts; we need nothing more. The prophecy and the history, simply placed side by side, will furnish a proof which none of our adversaries can gainsay, much as they may wish to resist the conclusions to which it leads. The only way of escape for the infidel is to discard the testimony of all history, and, for consistency's sake, he might as well discard the testimony of his senses also.

EDWARD.

The proof afforded by the accomplishment of

prophecy seems in some respects also independent of the rest of the arguments that may be adduced in favour of Christianity ; for if we knew nothing of the author of the Pentateuch, we must conclude, from the fulfilment of its prophecies, that it was of divine authority.

BEATRICE.

And in that case our principal anxiety would be to ascertain its being free from any corruption of the original text.

MR. B.

In such an important question it would not, however, be safe to decide on the fulfilment of only one prediction, unless that fulfilment involved a super-human agency ; but you have now seen that it is neither upon one prophecy, nor upon one species of predictions, nor upon one prophet alone, that we rest our conclusions. The prophecies were delivered in a succession of ages, by persons who had no connexion with each other, who do not appear always to have been aware of the extent of their own predictions. Of a great number we can positively prove the fulfilment ; of many others every probability lies on the same side ; and in no case can we ascertain the failure of any of these. For that some are yet unfulfilled is no argument against them, since the time for their fulfilment is not limited ;

and in those predictions where the time was limited, we know the prophecy was fulfilled.

EDWARD.

If you do not regard the obscurity supposed by some to exist on this subject as real, to what would you impute the difficulties connected with it?

MR. B.

I would by no means deny that some degree of obscurity does exist in the prophecies themselves: there appears no reason to doubt that some were made designedly obscure, *i. e.* so far that they should only be understood from the fulfilment; and for this obscurity, in some cases, we may perceive good reason. Thus, if the abrogation of the Mosaic law had been more clearly and fully predicted, it would have been impossible to have preserved a due respect for it till the time arrived for its abrogation.

BEATRICE.

This accounts for a designed obscurity in the *prediction* itself, but does not account for the obscurity which has attended the *fulfilment* in some cases.

MR. B.

We have no reason to complain if the lapse of time has in some measure thrown an obscurity over the fulfilment of prophecy, which did not

exist at the time of the fulfilment. This is only an evil incident to the very nature of the subject, which it would require a miracle to counteract. As to any obscurity arising in the application of prophecies to particular events, I believe it springs principally from our ignorance of the language in which the predictions are recorded, and of the particulars of the events in which they were fulfilled. Much of the difficulty connected with this subject also arises from an improper mode of studying the subject.

BEATRICE.

The subject certainly should not be made answerable for difficulties, raised by our faults or deficiencies; but how ought it to be studied?

MR. B.

It can only be properly studied by a reference to its own intimations on this subject. It must only be judged of with reference to its own pretensions. If the prophetical parts of Scripture had been designed to develope the *whole* train of human events in *regular* order, we might have just grounds of objection; but we find its language of a very different nature, and by that we must abide. "*The spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus,*" says the angel in the Apocalypse; a text which throws great light upon the object of prophecy, and furnishes a satisfactory reply to

those who object to the *limited* nature of prophecy.

EDWARD.

In some cases, however, this is not the case, as in the predictions of the rise and fall of kingdoms:

MR. B.

If you attend to the words of the text, you will see that it is correct. You cannot limit it to the mere life and death of our Lord: all the events which in preceding affected the circumstances of his birth, which were connected with his life, or which were consequent upon his death; all the changes of empires which were more immediately influential upon either the Jewish or the Christian church, certainly fall justly within its province. More than this you will hardly find unaccompanied by evident and striking reasons for insertion, either in the prediction itself, or the *peculiar circumstances* of the nation to whom it was addressed.

EDWARD.

Still we might have expected greater order in the delivery of prophecy.

MR. B.

If the delivery of prophecy had been merely the selection of certain events by the prophets, and all the future, or all parts of it relative to the testimony respecting Jesus, had been known to

them, you might have made this supposition; but St. Peter informs us, that

“The prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”—2 *Pet.* i. 21.

It is folly for us to argue against the manner or the order in which the prophecies were delivered, since we have no rule by which to direct our judgment; and all reasonings from our own partial knowledge or views of fitness, when applied to a subject of this nature, which must be regulated by *infinite* knowledge, are absurd.

BEATRICE.

But the prophecies are not so totally destitute of regularity in some respects. In those which relate especially to our Lord there is some order preserved, for they proceed from general intimations to more detailed predictions.

EDWARD.

Does not this, however, show more of artifice than any thing else? Why should not the earlier prophets have declared all particulars as explicitly as those of later date?

MR. B.

I do not profess to answer all your whys and wherefores, as we did not take this subject for the sake of shewing how ingeniously we might

argue for and against it. Your present objection can only have weight where it might be inferred, that proximity in time would enable a person to see more clearly the probabilities of future events. In the case of the predictions of Scripture, the latest prophet, Malachi, could have no advantages over his brethren as to the prophecies which he delivered. The events were as improbable and as unforeseen at a distance of four hundred years as four thousand.

BEATRICE.

But cannot some reason be assigned for this progression in the information given by prophecy?

MR. B.

There can. It would have been absurd for Moses to have prophesied of our Lord's coming to the second Temple, when neither the first nor the second had existed. What interest would such a prophecy have had to the Israelites in the wilderness? What influence would it have on their conduct? The prophecy when addressed by Malachi to the desponding Jews, who mourned the inferiority of the second Temple to the first, had the greatest force. It was sufficient to our first parents to know that a Saviour should arise; it was peculiarly encouraging to Abraham to know that the Saviour was to arise from him; but

reverse these, and you altogether destroy their effect, as first delivered.

BEATRICE.

In considering the subjects of the prophecies, delivered at various times, there must then be a reference to those to whom they were addressed?

MR. B.

Unquestionably: for the prophecies were not delivered to be shut up from the public eye, as the books of the Sibyl were at Rome: they were given for the comfort, the encouragement, and admonishing of the people; they are connected with the most solemn entreaties to repentance, faith, or holiness of life; and were adapted to the peculiar characters of those whom they addressed, or the circumstances in which they were placed.

EDWARD.

Are we, then, to examine the predictions of each prophet separately from those of the rest?

MR. B.

By no means: we may so far examine and compare the words of each as to fix in what sense he used them; but we must on no account be contented with this; for it is directly opposed to the admonition which precedes the passage I quoted from St. Peter—"Knowing that no prophecy is of any *private* interpretation." If the Scriptures

had proceeded from various individuals without divine agency, we ought to have respect principally to the ideas of each independently of the rest; but when we are assured that they were alike the agents of the one and the same Holy Spirit in this matter, we must ascertain the meaning of the divine Author by a reference to the *whole* of his works.

EDWARD.

It is not, however, conceived, I believe, that the Holy Spirit so influenced the prophets as to deprive them of their ordinary faculties, or supersede their natural abilities.

MR. B.

If this had been the case, the evidence for the Scriptures would have been materially weakened. We should have lost all power of arguing from them as independent witnesses, where historical records failed. All that is implied in this divine agency on the mind, only affects the facts of what were delivered. The impression of these was imprinted upon the mind with the greatest certainty, but each communicated that impression to others by the natural means peculiar to himself. The *difference* of style in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, mark these prophets clearly as distinct men: but the *sameness* of the subject (taking the word in an extended sense) as clearly decides the same-

ness of the Spirit which revealed the future to all.

BEATRICE.

There is, however, in all a very high style of language, and extraordinary greatness of thought.

MR. B.

This most probably is owing to the grandeur of the subjects on which they treated, and the impression necessarily made upon their minds by the very nature of heavenly communications. They to whom the almighty Creator and Governor of all things revealed his will, could not write of him so unworthily as others, not blessed with similar communications, would be liable to do.

EDWARD.

From what has been said, it would appear that we may regard the prophecies in two ways, either with reference to those in whose time they were delivered, or with respect to those in whose time they were to be fulfilled.

MR. B.

And even beyond this it may occasionally be useful to review them as affecting *all* who lived after the time of their delivery, and before their fulfilment, and as affecting *all* who lived after the last-mentioned period. The two classes you mentioned are indeed those to whom they were more directly addressed ; but it appears clear that they were intended also for the use of the other two,

very nearly if not altogether to as great an extent. It is not merely in the very words of the prediction itself that we perceive the spirit of prophecy ; in the very *fact* of its being given at all, we may sometimes trace the divine Mind, foreseeing what would be necessary for the comfort and support of his people in after times, when the prophet slumbered in the dust. This also became in some measure necessary, in consequence of limits having been put to the duration of their heavenly communications. Several of the admonitions and cautions of the apostles seem decidedly of a prospective nature ; and in other cases, where some ground for express precepts may have existed, it is by no means improbable that they were given more with reference to the future than the present need of the church.

BEATRICE.

This also ought to be the character of a revelation of this nature, that it should foresee and provide for contingencies.

EDWARD.

It is from the want of this knowledge, among other things, that we infer the falsity of Mahometanism ; for the proof depended upon continued success, and success involved the impossibility of the observance of some of its precepts.

BEATRICE.

Yet if that had not been the case, we could not

have inferred the truth of the religion, since human foresight, unaided by divine inspiration, could have guarded against such a conclusion.

MR. B.

But human foresight alone could not have suggested the predictions of St. Paul, in his Second Epistle to the Thessalonians ; and the precepts in that to the Colossians appear of a nature so interesting to the universal church in after ages, that it is not unreasonable to suppose St. Paul must have foreseen the universal circulation of that Epistle, and had respect to the errors of much larger bodies of professing Christians than were likely at that time to disturb the little community at Colosse. It is also important to observe, that the predictions which relate to future corruptions in the church, and the precepts which appear to have reference to them, could never be the *occasion* of their own fulfilment. No one would willingly take upon himself the apostolic anathema ; no body of men could desire to render themselves liable to it, or so act as to compel others to fulfil predictions of so fatal a nature.

EDWARD.

Are not many of the prophecies supposed to have double fulfilments ?

MR. B.

The existence of a secondary fulfilment of prophecy is a point of great difficulty to decide with

certainty. That two events may possibly fulfil the same prediction (particularly if couched in general terms) may be granted ; but that it was *intended* that both should fulfil it, can only be established by strong evidence; and though many circumstances may render this probable, I am not aware of such evidence having actually been adduced. In some cases it is also not improbable, that the writers of the New Testament quoted the words of a prophecy, which was known to have been fulfilled at an earlier period, only as an illustration of a later event, as they appear occasionally to use other parts of the sacred writings in a similar way. In so doing, they could not be misunderstood by those to whom they wrote; and we must therefore not hastily deem them “inconclusive reasoners” for adopting the method of argument most popular with those whom they thus addressed.

BEATRICE.

No conclusive argument, then, can be drawn from their quotations of this nature in favour of the double sense?

MR. B.

I think not; but upon this point I would speak with diffidence. The consideration of it is not essential to the argument as to the truth of Christianity; and as such, I shall only refer you to the works of Warburton and Marsh, — the former in defence of the secondary sense, and the latter against it.

“For, let the result of an inquiry into *secondary* senses be what it will, the prophecies which testify of Christ, according to their *primary* sense, are sufficiently numerous to supply us with arguments for the truth of our religion.”—*MARSH's Lectures*, xxii. p. 61.

Having mentioned the name of Warburton, it would be very negligent in me were I not to press upon you, if your minds are in any respect unsatisfied as to the subject, by no means to omit the perusal of the sermons preached at the lecture founded by that great scholar expressly for this subject. Perhaps few institutions have been more fortunate in a succession of able men; and you will find in their works not less learning than strong argument blended with piety.

EDWARD.

There have been a great number of publications on the book of Revelation; but I believe there is little agreement. Do you consider this as a serious objection?

MR. B.

It has been considered by Michaelis as an objection against the book itself; but if you read his remarks upon it, you should also examine the arguments of Dr. Woodhouse in its defence. It is not at all surprising that difference of opinion should exist upon this subject, when the figurative language in which it is couched, together with great part of it being yet unfulfilled, is duly considered. It is confessedly the most difficult

portion of the prophetical records, and has had in consequence the greatest number of commentators. That out of so many, much nonsense should have been produced, is not at all surprising to any who remember, that

“Fools rush in, where angels fear to tread :”

but it would be no great proof of wisdom on that account to discard from consideration the works of sober and learned men, more anxious to follow the guidance of Scripture, than to claim an office not much lower than that of the prophet himself, as some have done, in expanding obscure intimations into detailed predictions of events yet in the womb of time.

EDWARD.

The Apocalypse carries on the declarations of prophecy to the end of the world ; so that we have now a complete chain of evidence of this nature, from the fall of man to his final judgment. It surely is a strong argument for Christianity, that not one link of this chain should have been broken.

BEATRICE.

When I consider the chances that must have happened in every age, the number of particulars in which it was exposed to danger, and the number of enemies who would gladly have detected a failure, it appears to me that a special providence has watched over it.

MR. B.

I feel confident, that the more you examine this subject, the firmer will be your conviction upon it. I have generally observed that those who have had the least confidence in it, argued from theory rather than examination. Now there are few subjects in which theory, unaccompanied by examination, is more apt to mislead; and it never surprises me, therefore, to find such persons speaking of it as unsatisfactory. It is very much to be wished, that those who doubt upon the subject should seriously account for the *facts* of the case, go into the detail, and trace up the phenomena to some other cause, if they have not a divine origin. When the probabilities come to be compared between the believer's account and that of the sceptic, I have no doubt the latter would not be very ambitious to transmit them to posterity side by side.

CONVERSATION XVI.

MR. B.

IN the evidence of miracles and prophecy, we have such strong attestations to the truth of Christianity, that it perhaps is not easy to add any thing which shall not appear weak in comparison ; but there are yet some considerations of great importance, as confirming their evidence, and as affording additional reason to believe, “ *we have not followed cunningly devised fables.*” That which I shall now bring before you is the evidence afforded that Christianity is the one dispensation for which all others were preparatory, and which shall last to the end of time.

EDWARD.

That this may be the case is exceedingly probable from what we have already seen ; but it will greatly strengthen my conviction if established, as overthrowing the infidel objection that a revelation should be for all ages.

MR. B.

That the Bible clearly states the dependence of each dispensation of Divine Providence upon that which preceded it, must be admitted by every one who reads it ; and he who does not read it can have no claim for an answer to an objection founded upon

wilful ignorance. It may, however, be useful to recall to your minds some of the leading facts.

Of the first dispensation under which man was placed we know little; nor is it of importance to the proof of the truth of Christianity that we should know more, since the *necessity* for that revelation only arose from the abrupt termination of the happiness of our first parents in Paradise, by the fall.

From the fall to the time of Abraham, we find no especial provision made for the securing the continuance of religion upon the earth, beyond the occasional exertions of some zealous servants of God. Man appears to have been left in a great measure to develope his own powers and dispositions during a period of about one-third the whole time that has elapsed since the fall.

BEATRICE.

The consequence we know was most fatal to the interests of mankind, as well as of religion; for the “whole earth was full of violence, and the imaginations of the heart of man were only evil, and that continually.”

MR. B.

That this statement is correct, all the light which remote antiquity can afford seems to testify; the general tradition appearing to have been, that man deteriorated from bad to worse. The general experience of mankind seems to testify that man is unable to live in society without religion. When the

worship of the true God was lost, it therefore became necessary to supply its place. We have not time to enter into an inquiry as to the origin of Pagan idolatry; I only refer to it now, as affording a sufficient reason for the separation of Abraham from his country. Experience had already shewn to the world (and it was to the world that it was necessary this fact should be shewn, that the tendency of man was to forsake God. If the patriarchal dispensation did not prove the forbearance of God, and the fallen state of man, I know not what could prove them. Those who object to the length of time which had elapsed before our Lord's coming into the world, must at least give up the objection against the forbearance of God, as described in the Old Testament. We know from the history of the world in subsequent periods, what could be effected by man when advancing from a state of barbarism, and certainly have a right to argue from the ordinary development of the human powers in society, that at the call of Abraham a very different state of things *ought* to have existed from that which in fact did exist.

EDWARD.

This shews that the call of Abraham was not *premature*, but that full time had been given as a state of trial in this dispensation.

MR. B.

All experience proved that there was no *human*

probability of religion being preserved without express revelation and a new dispensation: these were accordingly given. I would now ask, what could be better calculated to secure the great purposes which then became more fully developed in prophecy, than the situation in which Abraham and his descendants were placed, the life they were required to lead, and the promises given unto them?

BEATRICE.

But even among them there was no small tendency to imitate the evil deeds of those around them.

MR. B.

True, and mark the next step. By a series of circumstances in which the finger of God is most plainly perceptible, and which must have produced a strong impression at the time among them, we find them fixed in Egypt, then certainly inferior to no country in the world, either as to riches or advancement in arts and sciences. By their observance of the worship and institutes of God they continue a separate people; as such they excite the jealousy of the king and nation — are exposed to persecution — they cry for help to the God of their fathers, and are delivered.

BEATRICE.

Up to the moment of their deliverance our pity is certainly excited for the Israelites; but after

that we look upon them as the injurers rather than the injured.

MR. B.

But in all these transactions we still see the agreement of the providence of God with the declarations of his word — we see a marked design of giving the nations every chance for repentance. The Israelites went down into Egypt with all the advantages that the successful administration of Joseph could secure; they went down too few in number to alarm the people; they were regarded as the conferrers of benefits; and they carried with them the knowledge of the one true God. After a residence of two hundred years, we find no impression made upon Egyptian idolatry; even a succession of heavy judgments only affecting them for the time during which they were operating: and the very earliest accounts we have of this country from Pagan writers, represent it as the very hotbed of the most monstrous superstitions.

EDWARD.

And if this was the first of nations, what must the worst have been?

MR. B.

To this degraded state had the world then sunk; from this it had to be rescued; from the consequences also of guilt like this was salvation requisite. A Saviour had been promised; but how

could he appear when the world was in such a state? As a long series of years had been granted to “prove what was in man,” a considerable time was necessary to prepare the world for the salvation which experience had shewn to be so absolutely necessary. The salvation to be effected was of the highest kind, and it became therefore necessary to shew that it was such by corresponding preparation.

BEATRICE.

And that preparation was, I suppose, afforded in the Jewish Theocracy, and the dispensation of the law of Moses. “*The law was our school-master to bring us to Christ.*”

MR. B.

It was so; and when you next read the Pentateuch, mark with what care it was drawn up for that purpose. The great truths of natural religion were now confirmed and strengthened; a definite law was added, and a special providence connected with its observance; a better covenant intimated, and a greater prophet than Moses promised. On every side the Israelite saw the hand of God present: the divine voice was ever sounding in his ears; he could not escape from the knowledge of God. Yet of how singular a nature was the knowledge thus given—the mercy of God so abundant, his justice so rigid, his holiness so intense! Again, their connexion with him was no

less singular ; the highest blessings and most terrible curses suspended over them ; the most singular injunctions, with promises connected with them equally strange ; commands utterly to destroy the wicked inhabitants of Canaan, with the fearful warning that the same doom would be theirs, if they followed their example ; the gift of a kingdom, with the incessant admonition that it only became theirs on account of the wickedness of the inhabitants, and not for any merit in themselves ; precepts of the most terrible rigour as to their conduct towards man, with others of the most tender care, even for animals ; and yet these again sacrificed in profusion to a God whose tender mercies were over all his works.

EDWARD.

This appears a strange mixture.

MR. B.

Yet, taken with reference only to itself, it was of the greatest consequence in preparing this people to become the depositaries of the will of God till the promised Saviour came, and, when explained by the New Testament, furnishes abundant proof of “ the manifold wisdom of God.”

It was only by the most severe judgments that this people could be kept in the service of God. They were taught, first, by the most terrible examples of the ruin of others, and, secondly, by their own sufferings, the truth and certainty of the

commandments of God. So far as common life was concerned, their law is admirable for its justice, its benevolence, and its anxious care for the welfare of each; but all was to give place to this first and great commandment,—“*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength;*”—and it was only where this was observed, that the second followed, which however was then equally to be obeyed,—“*Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*” It is not easy to conceive of any method likely to be more effectual in impressing the mind with the strictness and extent of the commands of God, and of the necessity of observing them.

BEATRICE.

The whole character of the Old Testament has always struck me as that of excessive strictness.

MR. B.

That the establishment of the Israelites in Canaan, and their subsequent preservation, must have had a most powerful effect in restoring and preserving the knowledge of the true God cannot be doubted, though we are not able, from the length of time which has since elapsed, to ascertain the extent to which this was carried. With regard to other nations, we find their knowledge of the divine unity generally to be traced to the vicinity of this nation; and where we inquire among

nations that decidedly had no connexion with them, we find nothing but the most disgusting superstitions.

EDWARD.

These circumstances strongly corroborate the Scripture statements, and equally shew the necessity of securing the continuance of some knowledge of God till such time as a revelation capable of universal dissemination could be established.

MR. B.

We must now turn our attention to some things more immediately connected with that revelation, and without which no reasonable conjecture can be formed for their institution. Besides the moral law, we have another, the Levitical or ceremonial law, containing such an immense number of observances, that at first we can hardly fix our attention even on the more prominent parts, so as to inquire for what purpose they could be enjoined.

EDWARD.

It does indeed appear strange that in the same work we should find such high ideas of God inculcated, with such trifling regulations for his worship, and such an incessant flow of blood to Him who was the Creator of all.

MR. B.

But if you turn to the Epistle to the Hebrews,

you will see sufficient reason given for all this: you there find that all had an object; that all was designed to lead to just conclusions on the nature of God, the situation of man, the guilt of sin, the necessity of atonement, of a Mediator betwixt God and man, of purity of heart, and devotion to God.

BEATRICE.

And we have a right to regard the explanation of the New Testament as just, from the performance of the miracles, and the fulfilment of the prophecies.

MR. B.

Taken separately from the New Testament, to us, living at this period, with the history of the world before us, the whole would become absurd; but when we view it only as the type of a better dispensation which was to follow, its insertion becomes highly expedient, if not absolutely necessary. The true Israelite, who looked beyond the types and shadows of ritual observance to the great sacrifice hereafter to be offered for sin, would, though thankful for the light thus afforded him, rejoice that the time approached when this "heavy yoke" would be exchanged for the liberty with which the Messiah would make him free.

BEATRICE.

This closely connects the two Testaments together, and makes them, strictly speaking, only parts of one revelation.

MR. B.

Nor is this all; for not only do the positive ordinances of God appear as types of better things to come,—even some historical facts must be admitted in a similar manner. The deliverance from Egypt, the Passover, the passage through the Red Sea, the wanderings in the wilderness, the rest in Canaan, correspond too closely with higher things in the Christian dispensation, for us not to acknowledge the hand of Providence as prefiguring in these greater mercies.

BEATRICE.

They form a kind of prophecy in actions, as others are in words.

MR. B.

But all this manifests a deliberate course of proceedings, a regular plan laid down and acted upon from the beginning, and that which explains the whole cannot therefore be treated as if it were a thing unheard of before, for ages.

EDWARD.

Yet some write as if Christianity appeared 1800 years ago, wholly without expectation, having no foundation in any thing before.

MR. B.

But in all we have hitherto considered, we find a constant reference to something which preceded

and something which followed. If in Abraham all nations of the earth were to be blessed, it was because from him should spring that seed of the woman which should bruise the serpent's head; and therefore to his seed should the land of Canaan be given, that he might spring there from the tribe of Judah.

Thus also advancing further, we find every thing still arranged with reference to some succeeding revelation, as well as that which preceded it, and thereby the whole is strictly connected together. In every stage we find the same efforts to impress upon the minds of the people the necessity for the salvation hereafter to be wrought, its magnitude, and the consequences which should result from it. The feelings of the Jews, as a nation, were interested by the promise, that from them the Messiah should spring; a succession of heavy judgments at length had the effect of eradicating idolatry; the great changes in which the mightiest empires on every side of them were overthrown were so over-ruled by Divine Providence, that they remained a separate people in their own land.

EDWARD.

It is singular that the ten tribes should have been utterly ruined when carried away captive, whilst the rest were brought back to their own country, and were enabled to rebuild their Temple, and observe the Mosaical law.

MR. B.

The history of the East during that period, from the light thrown upon it by revelation, becomes more interesting and important than we otherwise could have imagined. In seeing such men as Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus, whilst overthrowing empires, only fulfilling the designs of Providence, we are led to form correct ideas of the nature of the divine government, and duly to appreciate that kingdom which the Lord was about to set up, and for which all these were but preparatory.

BEATRICE.

The accomplishment of many of the prophecies having taken place during these times, must have contributed to impress the minds of the Israelites with a due sense of the divine attributes, and of the necessity of implicit obedience to the will of God.

MR. B.

And hence the sneer of Gibbon appears as weak as it is malicious. Without fairly meeting the question, he insinuates, that there is little reason to believe in the miracles of the Old Testament, because it is only in later times that the Jews have been free from idolatry. But effects cannot take place before their causes have operated; and who that considers the state of the world in those times, the "mixed multitude" that came out of Egypt, and their situation in Canaan, can be

surprised that they were at times seduced into idolatry. Like all other nations, they were naturally prone to idolatry; all others but themselves were idolaters: the idea of national and local deities was at that time universally prevalent. They had true miracles; but others had what to many must have appeared true miracles also: the law of God ran counter to the spirit of the people; and is it then to be wondered at, that, though many miracles wrought among them proved "the Lord to be God," an ignorant people should not immediately perceive that there was only this one God, and that "him only must they serve," although he had declared it?

BEATRICE.

It required a considerable time to convince them of these great truths; but when once convinced, they retained them most firmly.

MR. B.

There is an error very common among many modern writers, of reasoning upon facts, as if the same light and knowledge existed formerly which does at present; of taking it for granted, that, in the earliest times, whole nations would draw conclusions as soberly and logically as they may do in their closets. But experience must decide; and I do not think it would be necessary to travel out of our own times for abundant proofs of the

proneness of human nature to lower the divine authority and the demands of religion, and of its willingness to take the most inconclusive evidence in favour of what agreed with its wishes.

EDWARD.

When the miracles were wrought before their eyes, the effect upon them seems fully answerable to our expectations; as at the deliverance from Pharaoh in the Red Sea: when Elijah called down fire from heaven, the people cried, "The Lord he is the God, the Lord he is the God."

MR. B.

The evidence afforded by a special providence was necessarily interrupted when the Jews ceased to observe the commandments; and then it was that prophecy became more abundant. The grand question at issue, viz. whether the God of the Jews was the *only* real God, was put upon the accomplishment of prophecies, which were made so definite and detailed, that there was no escaping from some conclusion, for or against them. Now what was the consequence?—nothing less than the extirpation of idolatry among the people. Our conclusion, therefore, must be, that the people saw with their own eyes the prophecies fulfilled; they felt that it was in vain to fight against God; they saw no God of any other nation had delivered his votaries; and therefore had the fullest convic-

tion, that such were only the creatures of the imagination, or literally the works of men's hands.

EDWARD.

All history seems calculated to give the idea, that just views of God and of his service are but slowly embraced by the bulk of mankind.

MR. B.

And the cause is not far removed; for, so far as the intellect only is concerned, we ever see persons stopping at second causes, or having recourse to some occult quality, the existence of which can neither be proved nor disproved. With respect to the heart, I think no one can doubt, that, naturally, all men seek to make their religion such as will favour their own inclinations.

BEATRICE.

Of the infinite importance of truth, no one doubts in theory; but every day's experience shews how little it is regarded in practice.

MR. B.

The Jews, when once fixed in their religion, became bigots, and sought only, whilst retaining the great leading truths, to make it speak the language most agreeable to themselves. Any doubt as to idolatry was altogether out of the question; that the Lord only was God could not

be doubted ; but by keeping out of view the fact that He was “ a Spirit, and required those who worshipped him, to do it in spirit and in truth,” they contrived to retain every outward observance of respect, with little or no regard to higher duties.

EDWARD.

It was in this state that they were found by our Lord, who, by rebuking them for having “ made the Word of God of none effect,” drew upon himself the hatred of those “ who loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.”

MR. B.

If no period had elapsed sufficient to develope this general corruption of the Jewish nation, how much should we have wanted of the instruction of our Lord, which was called forth by the state in which he found them ! This instruction, you will also observe, is not merely applicable to the circumstances of the Jews, but becomes very important to the church itself, in later times, for its own use. The same endeavour to escape from moral obligation, which made the Jews seek to merge the whole of religion in ritual observances, has subsequently prevailed in a very large portion of the Christian church, and with as pernicious effects. Indeed, “ there is nothing new under the sun ;” human nature is ever developing the same propensities in different ways, as modified by

changes of situation, manners, and attainments : but the principle is the same in all ages, and under all circumstances.

EDWARD.

Our Lord, however, appeared at a period so far advanced as to have developed those modes of conduct ; and in the Gospel we are furnished with the best preservative against similar errors.

MR. B.

On reviewing the whole plan of redemption as displayed in the Holy Scriptures, connecting the Old and New Testaments with each other, it appears in all respects worthy of God. Every portion of it will, on such a survey, be found in its proper place, requisite for some beneficial purpose, and sufficient to the accomplishment of that for which it was designed. The Bible discloses a more magnificent display of the government of the great Creator of all things than we could possibly have imagined, had we been destitute of this light.

BEATRICE.

And what additional interest is thereby given to religion, when we see all things regulated with a regard to the improvement of man by its means !

MR. B.

The rise and fall of empires two or three thousand years ago, is indeed to us a matter of little

consequence ; but of what infinite importance it is to us, that, during the political convulsions which attended them, mankind were placed in a state of moral discipline, by which they were trained to be in a fit state to receive that Gospel which was able to make them wise unto salvation ! Even in the eyes of an enlightened Deist, the fixing the religion of a nation on the belief of one God, by whatever means effected, must appear of incalculable importance to the human race. They who are indifferent to revealed religion, acknowledge the benefit conferred on Europe by the Reformation, however they may lament peculiar circumstances connected with it. Upon the same principle that partial and temporary evils, in this case, are overlooked for the sake of universal and permanent good, we ought to argue with respect to the events which led to the firm establishment of the religion delivered by Moses.

EDWARD.

The case was desperate, and called for desperate remedies.

MR. B.

But those remedies were administered by Infinite Wisdom, which knew how to make even the wrath of man work to his praise, and to restrain its excess. With regard to the severe judgments which attended the Mosaic dispensation, the only real difficulty which appears to me existing is the

impression which might have been made on the minds of the Canaanites and other nations, by seeing such a people as the Israelites so highly favoured by Heaven.

EDWARD.

The Israelites themselves could not be ignorant that it was only on account of the wickedness of these nations that they were commanded to destroy them; this being often and emphatically repeated in their law, and their own sins as strongly reprobated.

BEATRICE.

But the Canaanites, who were destroyed without mercy, could hardly have comprehended the reason of this; they could only look upon the Israelites as robbers.

MR. B.

Putting religion out of the question, no more objection lies against the invasion of Canaan than any other invasion. In those countries, and in those times, robbery and oppression were alike common to all; so that I do not apprehend the Canaanites, who knew nothing of the religion of the Jews (if such there were), regarded the matter in any other light than a common war. They would have been equally ready to spoil and plunder others, had they had the power. Some of their kings had

already given pretty convincing proofs of their disposition in this way.

BEATRICE.

But it is in seeing the spoiling of the country sanctioned by God that the difficulty consists.

MR. B.

Those who were acquainted with the Jewish religion, must have known that all those who came up with the descendants of Israel from Egypt were not of the seed of Abraham. It could have been no difficult matter for individuals who truly abhorred the cruel and abominable superstitions of Canaan, to have united themselves to them. Some actually did so. There was decisive evidence against the religion of Canaan in itself; there was decisive evidence for the religion of the Jews in their miraculous deliverance from Egypt, and preservation in the desert.

BEATRICE.

The passage of the Jordan, and the fall of the walls of Jericho, were, at least, a solemn warning to the whole nation of the consequences which must ensue upon any opposition to the God of Israel: they must have known they were fighting against God.

MR. B.

They must also have known that God was justly

displeased at them, nor can I think they were ignorant that he was yet of great mercy ; but their sins were, in fact, such that they were not fit to live. The attack of the Israelites was to them what the fire from heaven had been to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. It was announced as such ; it was received as such ; it was regarded by others as such. They knew they were guilty ; and such as despaired of mercy from heaven resisted and perished.

EDWARD.

As to the possession of the country, they had only held it before by permission from God ; and at a time when he openly resumed his own, on account of their having forsaken him, it seems absurd to consider the Israelites as mere robbers and plunderers.

MR. B.

They acted under a special dispensation : the finger of God was manifest in the whole proceeding. The heavy doom which came upon them can only prove, that the worship and service of God is a matter of much more importance than some would persuade us. The same truth was afterwards as fully declared in the punishment of the Israelites, so that there is no such thing as the partiality which infidels would persuade us exists. The Israelites served the purpose for which they were separated from other nations, probably, as well as any other people would have done. In the

nature of things, general laws may press hard upon particular individuals ; but when we see God invariably apportioning to nations the results due by general laws to their conduct as nations, and yet know, that in every nation he that “ feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him,” and that hereafter every man shall receive according to his works,—we must confess that the judgment of God is according to truth.

CONVERSATION XVII.

MR. B.

ALL the previous dispensations had been limited as to their nature and extent, had reference to local and temporary circumstances, and were supported by means of a similar kind. Christianity, however, was designed to go far beyond these; it was to be that in which the knowledge of the Lord should cover the earth as the waters cover the sea; it was designed to last for ever; of this kingdom there was to be no end. The objects to which it was directed were of a higher kind, and the means by which it was to prevail were to be such as should alike endure through all time, and in all countries.

EDWARD.

But this involves several important questions. Is it certain that Christianity not only professes to be of this nature, but is also capable of universal reception and perpetual duration?

MR. B.

It is certain; and hence arises one of the strongest proofs of its divine origin. If all other evidences in its favour could be overcome, this alone would present an insuperable difficulty to the sceptic. This religion arose at a time when no such thing as an universal religion had ever, even for a moment,

been deemed possible by uninspired legislators. All out of Judea had sought to make religion universal, only by tolerating every species of superstition that might be invented. In Judea a religion strictly local prevailed; it was believed permanent, and its permanence depended upon the Jews remaining a separate people. Now what human cause could induce the idea of establishing a new religion which should be universal as to its extent; perpetual as to its duration; and yet exclusive as to every species of accommodation with any other religion? Such an idea might possibly be compatible with the state of our knowledge, but is altogether incompatible with that which then existed.

EDWARD.

If it had been suggested by the state of the world at that time, or by reflections on its previous history, traces of it would have been found in other writers.

BEATRICE.

But might they not take it from old writings?

EDWARD.

This only increases the difficulty, by removing it to a period still less likely to give birth to such an idea.

MR. B.

Now this idea originated in Palestine, among the very people most indifferent to the welfare of

other nations, most exclusive in their views of national aggrandizement.

EDWARD.

No one would ever have expected from a Jew the giving up the prejudices of education for public benefit. Yet this plan of the greatest good originated with the Jews; the nation most deficient in general good will to others; the people regarded as hating the rest of the human race.

MR. B.

Again, supposing this difficulty got over by the sceptic, he is met by another not less formidable. Perhaps there is no nation, the writers of which, in general, have been so deficient in those qualities which are the best calculated to render any production likely to be useful for all times and all places, than the Jews, with the exception of the writers of the sacred books. Among all their later authors, we find hardly any thing that is valuable for its own sake. We consult their books, not to gain information for ourselves, but to learn what they believed and taught. Of their excessive fanaticism, and of their bigoted attachment to their idea of a temporal prince who should restore the kingdom to Israel, it is hardly necessary to remind you. What, then, must we think at seeing this people send out a system of religion actually capable of universal reception and perpetual duration?

BEATRICE.

Is it not, then, only astonishing that they should have *wished* to promulgate this religion, but that they should have had the *power* to devise it at all?

MR. B.

From the very *nature* of the religion, as contrasted with the general spirit and acquirements of the people, we see strong corroborative evidence in behalf of its pretensions. But further: the alleged revelation thus sent out, professing to have this character of universality, was not produced at long intervals, and altered, corrected, and varied, as experience shewed it to be necessary, in order to preserve this character: it sprung out at once, finished and perfect, though nothing of the kind had before existed to furnish any guide to its formation. It was altogether original, and yet in all respects complete.

BEATRICE.

But might not a Jew allege, that the writers of the New Testament only added to the Old such things as would render the last mentioned capable of universal reception?

MR. B.

In that case, the additions must have been of such a nature as would be calculated to secure the support of those to whom they addressed themselves. Now in what does Christianity differ from

the preceding dispensations, and in what respects are these additions likely to secure converts? One of the most striking features in it is, the making the kingdom of Christ a spiritual and not a temporal kingdom. This, indeed, would obviate some difficulties attendant on the idea of a universal religion; but what impostor would adopt it, when by so doing he disappointed the expectations of all, and made many his most implacable enemies?

EDWARD.

The novelty of this idea must have been a great objection in all cases. To the Jews we know it was absolutely hateful.

MR. B.

Connected with this was the abolition of sacrifice and the ritual law.

BEATRICE.

This must have been a daring stroke in those times. It did not seem claimed by the necessity of the case, and exposed the new religion to great hazards.

MR. B.

And if either Jew or Pagan asked the reason of this, the Christian would only increase his astonishment and indignation by informing him, that "Christ, our passover, was sacrificed for us;" that

“ by this one offering of himself, he had perfected for ever them that are sanctified.”

EDWARD.

However conformable this may be, in fact, with the scriptures of the Old Testament, many will not, to this day, allow it. “ To the Jews the cross of Christ was a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness.”

MR. B.

And it was especially so because the victim and the prince were the same person. Another striking characteristic of Christianity was its actual declaration of permanence. It offered a religion strangely at variance with received opinions; it claimed to be the fulfilment of all preceding dispensations, but promised nothing beyond itself. Had the disciples, like the later Jews, taken up the idea of two messiahs—one a suffering, and the other a victorious prince—they might possibly have tolerated the account given of the one, for the sake of the hope which yet remained of the other. In excluding all hope of this kind, the disciples acted as no impostor would have done.

EDWARD.

But persons capable of conceiving the idea of a universal religion, of founding it upon previous revelations, of developing it at once so as to be really adapted to all nations, if not all times, could not

have been so careless as to matters of this kind. They could not be so destitute of prudence and discretion as to expose their alleged revelation to a test like this, and at the same time make all opposed to its claims. If we were to suppose that, after all, Christianity was an imposture, we must admit the union of the most astonishing prudence with the greatest neglect of it affecting the same things. We must admit their having introduced nothing that could be disproved, and yet in all this they made no use of the reigning passions and prejudices.

MR. B.

And now add to this the greatest wonder of all—the fact that the religion thus produced at once, by a few individuals of the most partial and unphilosophical people that ever existed, at a time when every thing prompted to a contrary course, not only was *then* found capable of universal reception, but has also *ever since* been found equally adapted for all ages and all nations, when every thing else has changed. One system of philosophy has overthrown another; new discoveries have proved to demonstration long-received opinions fallacious; and continual advances have been made in all sciences; but the Christian religion has remained unshaken and unchanged. No *proof* has been afforded, after the lapse of nearly eighteen hundred years, of error in any of its precepts or statements; no new discoveries have been made in either; no

change has been found necessary, to enable it to subsist amidst the continual change that has taken place in all things else.

EDWARD.

And yet it has had many powerful adversaries ; men whose natural acuteness was sharpened by strong desire to overthrow its authority.

MR. B.

But which is the more incredible of the two—that this religion should be produced in a nation and at a time singularly ill calculated for the discovery of a religion capable of universal application and perpetual duration, where all the probabilities are in favour of its truth, and yet after all be false—or that it proceeded from God ? We can account naturally and fully for the fact by the latter supposition, which is confirmed by all the evidence, external and internal, which can be brought forward on the subject, and cannot account for it on the former.

EDWARD.

To me it seems a greater miracle is supposed to exist by those who argue against Christianity, than what they declare themselves unable to receive ; for it would be, indeed, a deviation from the usual government of God, to put it wholly out of our power to disprove the truth of this religion, and to render it in appearance so probable. If Chris-

tianity be not true, what can be true? If we may not confide in it, in what may we trust?

MR. B.

This evidence in favour of Christianity, though only of a negative kind, becomes amazingly strong from the extent of the subject, and the length of time which has elapsed. If Christianity had only involved a few topics of consideration, we might have regarded it only as a lucky chance that it had proved correct in all; or if only a few years had elapsed since its promulgation, we might have doubted whether time would not prove its pretensions absurd; or if no changes had taken place in other things, we might have merely imputed its continuance to a general aversion to change; but when we see a religion involving so great an extent of subject, standing alone, unaffected by time, unmoved by changes of opinion, we cannot ascribe it to any other cause than abstract and unalloyed truth. See what destruction experimental philosophy has made among the theories of former times. Voltaire brings forward physical truth as the great test of religion. How then is it that a few ignorant men of that nation which was most likely to run into error on the subject of philosophy, should have sent out a religion which no subsequent advances in science could overthrow? How is it that they, amongst all the precepts which they give, should have escaped in every

instance? that in all the miracles they relate, they should never have involved themselves in such a contradiction as would overthrow the whole? The progress of science has not yet enabled any one to recall the dead, on whom corruption had seized, to life; no discovery of modern times has brought us any nearer to the healing diseases by a word.

EDWARD.

It appears that the old antagonists of Christianity had only one way of accounting for the miracles, and that, the progress of science has shewn to be absurd.

MR. B.

But the argument may be rendered still stronger. Some if not all the writers of the New Testament *lay claim to inspiration*, and thereby expose themselves to the severest test imaginable. A few errors might have been expected had they merely professed to give an account of what they had themselves been taught; but in laying claim to inspiration, and daring all the world, in all ages, to disprove their pretensions, no refuge is left for them. But what have they thus asserted which can be shewn unworthy of God, or impossible to have proceeded from him? The general consent of mankind, as to the excellency of the New Testament morality; the total want of proof on the infidel side against it, when considered in connexion with these pretensions of the apostles; must carry conviction to the mind of every honest man.

BEATRICE.

The precepts of the New Testament are so numerous and so determinate, that it seems out of all reason to suppose these men could invariably have been right, when even the greatest philosophers have failed, had they not been really inspired.

MR. B.

Many of these precepts also are such as were not only new at the time of their promulgation, but opposed to common opinion. Their excellency is indeed now apparent; but it has only been by experience that they have triumphed over prejudice and opposition. The precepts of St. Paul in connexion with his life, convey ideas not merely of excellence of the highest kind, but of the most original cast,—of such a nature as only to be duly appreciated upon examination. In him active benevolence and self-denial were exhibited to an extent that is unequalled in the annals of profane history. To confer the greatest degree of happiness to the greatest number possible by the best means, was not the object either of the religion or of the philosophy of Greece. To renounce, for the sake of mankind at large, all personal ease and reputation, was what Grecian patriotism had never contemplated. The true value of the soul of man had never been duly appreciated in the Pagan world; and nothing

could be more opposed to common notions than to teach that in this faith there was "neither Jew nor Greek, neither bond nor free."

BEATRICE.

So that in these respects time has added to the force of the evidences in behalf of Christianity.

MR. B.

In moral as in physical science, the progress of the mind has been slow. The history of mankind furnishes abundant evidence of the difficulty of attaining to a correct knowledge of first principles. How many ages have been spent in unlearning what had been in the first instance presumed upon insufficient evidence! How incessantly necessary we find it to recur to experience, to rectify opinions which seem fixed on the firmest basis of reason and expediency! Yet the precepts of the New Testament are given with the greatest decision and brevity; left, in all the hardihood of truth, to be tried by the experience of all mankind, in all ages.

EDWARD.

They are also given by different writers; and it would be difficult for their *agreement* in all points, upon any other hypothesis than that which they assign.

MR. B.

To all these considerations, now add that of

the character of our Lord, as developed in the Gospels: in all it is the *same*, and in itself so different from any thing else that the world has ever seen, that no other can bear any comparison with it. At first sight, it appears one which could not have been produced by imposture. All others who claimed the character of the Messiah as their own, took a very different course. As might have been expected from impostors, they adapted their pretensions to popular prejudices; they founded their hopes of empire on the ignorance and viciousness of those around them. Our Lord's appeal was to the Scriptures, his life, his works, his doctrine.

“ Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.”—*John*, v. 39.

“ Which of you convinceth me of sin?”—*John*, viii. 46.

“ Go and shew John again those things, which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them.”—*Matt.* xi. 4—6.

“ I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing. Why askest thou me? ask them which heard me, what I have said unto them: behold, they know what I said.”—*John*, xviii. 20, 21.

“ My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.”—*John*, vii. 16, 17.

BEATRICE.

These appeals were also made on public occasions of great importance, in the presence of numbers who were his bitterest enemies.

MR. B.

In laying claim to this absolute perfection of life and doctrine, at the same time that he exposed the false pretensions of others, our Lord drew upon himself their hatred, and rendered his character and precepts objects of the most rigid scrutiny. Yet what could they establish against him? Their own confession was,

“This man doeth many miracles.”—*John*, xi. 47.

“Never man spake like this man.”—*John*, vi. 47.

“And the chief priests and all the council sought for witness against Jesus, to put him to death; and found none. For many bare false witness against him, but their witness agreed not together. And there arose certain, and bare false witness against him, saying, We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands. But neither so did their witness agree together.”—*Mark*, xiv. 55—59.

“And Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, said unto them, Ye have brought this man unto me, as one that perverteth the people; and behold, I, having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man, touching those things whereof ye accuse him: no, nor yet Herod: for I sent you to him; and, lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto him.”—*Luke*, xxiii. 13—15.

“ Pilate saith unto them, Take ye him and crucify him, for I find no fault in him. The Jews answered him, *We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God.*”—*John*, xix. 6-7.

BEATRICE.

We cannot have stronger attestation from enemies than these.

MR. B.

I shall only add the solemn declaration of St. Peter on the same subject, that

“ Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow his steps : *who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.*”—1 *Peter*, 21-22.

BEATRICE.

If the life of our Lord, so far as we can collect it from the sacred writings, in any particular proved these declarations false, all would be lost.

MR. B.

Yet in no instance has error or sin been detected.

EDWARD.

The conclusion, then, must follow that he was the Messiah ?

MR. B.

It must : for all the evidence we can bring forward upon the subject leads to that conclusion. Who can believe that the Jews would have imputed his miracles to magic, if they could have

disproved them by other means; that they would have required that he should be put to death, "*because he made himself the Son of God,*" if they could have produced evidence of sin? The Gospels afford us abundant proof of the pains they had taken "*to entangle him in his talk;*" and what instance have we, except this, of any one ever having been able at all times to preserve himself from error? Our Lord was attacked in such a variety of ways, was tried by so many different characters, that he could not have escaped some taint of common failing, had he been otherwise than what he professed. We find no instance of any other "enduring such contradiction of sinners against himself;" of any other "being tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin."

BEATRICE.

In considering our Lord's conduct, perhaps we are not so much struck with the excellence of particular actions, from finding nothing but perfection in all.

MR. B.

There is also a peculiarity in our Lord's character that well deserves our attention; viz. that singular union of assumption of the greatest authority with the most entire humility.

"Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also, that God was his Father, making himself equal with God."—*John*, v. 18.

“Ye call me Master and Lord; and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.”—*John*, xiii. 13—15.

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”—*Matthew*, xi. 28—30.

BEATRICE.

If we had not the Gospels in our hands, it would be very difficult to conceive how such high pretensions could be reconciled with such deep humility.

MR. B.

It is also well deserving of your attention in how complete a manner the union of two distinct characters is united in our Lord. As about to leave a perfect example for his disciples to follow, we find him passing through the ordinary occupations of life as though he had no higher object, with only one or two exceptions, evidently introduced for the sake of reminding those whom it concerned of his real origin and ultimate destination. But turning to him in his public character, we find he admits of no comparison with other men. From the beginning “*he taught as one having authority* :” he purged the Temple as his peculiar office: he declared “*The Son of Man*

is Lord of the sabbath:" he works a miracle expressly that they may know "*The Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins.*" The general character both of his miracles and his teaching is that of command. His declarations as to his own high dignity are as solemn and express as could well be imagined.

EDWARD.

The necessity of the case evidently prevented their not being more frequent and public.

MR. B.

At Mount Tabor, in his public entrance into Jerusalem, and on some other remarkable occasions, particularly when before the chief priests, immediately before his crucifixion, our Lord, however, decidedly assumed the character of the Messiah. After his resurrection, when all doubt was removed from the minds of the disciples, we find greater reserve. They could no longer live with him as they had formerly done; and his appearance could never take place without a sense of awe. "None of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou?" even after the terrors excited by his first appearance in their midst had passed away. Now all this is perfectly consistent with the Scripture statement as to the Messiah: by no other means can the prophecies of the Old Testament be fulfilled in one person. But had it not all occurred, who would even have imagined such a union of ap-

parently irreconcilable characters? who could have developed it in such a manner as it is done in the Gospels?

BEATRICE.

At times we forget the greatness of our Lord, when we see him so good and affectionate as a son, so considerate with regard to his friends, so meek and patient towards his enemies.

EDWARD.

And yet at others, as when he walks on the sea, is transfigured on the mount, and ascends to heaven, our attention is almost wholly fixed upon him as the Son of God.

MR. B.

Yet so perfect is this singular union of the two characters, that we never perceive any improbability in it which breaks the reality so apparent throughout. There is nothing forced or out of place in any passage of our Saviour's life. His doctrine is brought before us, not systematically, and his office is not declared formally; but we determine both by the accidents of the day which bring them before us. It is only by reflection and comparison that we discover how much has been revealed to us. There is no detail of particular virtues, with examples under each head; no summing up of extraordinary powers; no attempt to contrast the superiority of the life thus displayed with the inferiority of others; no long and orderly

enumeration of miracles wrought, and prophecies fulfilled; no analysis of doctrine, or selection of pointed sayings: all is told which struck the writer as remarkable, as it appeared or was related to him, without even adherence to the order of time. Yet the whole presents us with a perfect character, teaching perfect doctrine, and at once furnishing the example of obedience in all things necessary for man, and using the language of command, as him to whom "all power was given in heaven and in earth." Now when we consider what the *greatest minds have done* in their attempts to develop perfect characters, and remember by *whom* these accounts were written, at what time, and in what countries; if we further consider what others have written of the same nation, and recollect that this is a *solitary* instance of perfection; that it was not progressive, not the labour of successive ages to render it faultless; but that a few poor fishermen and others of Galilee sent out these accounts of the Founder of Christianity, these statements of the nature of his religion, which, after nearly 1800 years, still appear in all nations equally and essentially divine—we must, we cannot do otherwise than follow the dictates of common sense, in believing them divine.

CONVERSATION XVIII.

MR. B.

THERE is only one remaining portion of the Evidences which it appears necessary for you to consider. We have seen the adaptation of Christianity to all nations and all ages : it remains that we examine into its adaptation to all persons of every class in society.

BEATRICE.

I recollect our Saviour's expression, "To the poor the Gospel is preached;" but this does not restrict its influence to the poor alone.

MR. B.

By no means: nevertheless, it has been in some respects the peculiar characteristic of the Gospel, that it extended its benefits to all alike, the poor as well as the rich.

EDWARD.

The Grecian philosophy was altogether defective in this respect: it left the great mass of mankind to pursue the same courses, however vicious.

MR. B.

At the time of our Lord's appearing, Judea also was infected with the same error. The professed teachers of the people cared for very little beyond

the preserving their own authority; and to do this with the least inconvenience to themselves, they "took away the key of knowledge, and neither entered in themselves, and those that would they hindered." The philosophising sects cared nothing for those who were not able to enter into the subtleties of their disquisitions; and in general the higher ranks were quite indifferent to the welfare of those beneath them.

EDWARD.

In these respects, other countries have been in a great measure similarly circumstanced.

MR. B.

The same causes produce the same effects, though the names may be changed. Hence, however, arises the importance of a religion which shall do that which philosophy cannot do; which shall present objects of contemplation sufficiently great to interest the strongest mind, and fix the attention of those whose attainments enable them to range over a vast extent of human knowledge, and which shall at the same time have much that even the lowest can understand, and feel to be of importance.

BEATRICE.

A religion, indeed, suited for all times and countries, would yet be very partial, if only adapted for a peculiar class.

MR. B.

In addition to this power of universal application, a religion which is designed to produce great effects must be able to operate upon the mind by sufficient motives. Commands without sanctions, precepts without authority, are of little avail, particularly to the lower orders. A well-regulated and well-informed mind may be capable of doing and suffering much by the aid of "*divine philosophy*;" but it is vain to reason with the suffering poor, who are also ignorant, on general principles of necessity, fitness, and expediency. "He refuseth to hear the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely." Now the Christian religion does possess both the power of fully occupying all minds, from the least to the greatest, and that of influencing all by sufficient motives.

EDWARD.

But to contrive a religion possessed of these qualifications would have been a task far beyond the powers of a set of poor Galileans; so in this I see we have additional evidence of the divine origin of Christianity.

MR. B.

It is not my intention to go into details connected with the peculiar doctrines of Christianity, as of course it would be necessary for me first to

establish them from the Scriptures; but it is allowed on all hands, that its doctrines are sufficient to fix the attention, and exercise the highest powers of the mind. They are also not delivered as matters to be reasoned upon, and retained or rejected, according to our view of their propriety; but are taught simply upon authority, and as such they may be received by the lowest classes. The things into which "angels desire to look," and which the mightiest intellects have not been able to grasp, may yet to the humble believer afford strong ground of comfort or instruction: for it is not true, as some would persuade the world, that the doctrines and precepts of Christianity are independent of each other. They are so mingled together, and the latter in particular so arise from the former, that they cannot be separated. They rest upon the same authority; and since, in the precepts respecting practice, we know that nothing has been enjoined to be done but what is good, so in those respecting faith, we ought to conclude nothing has been enjoined undeserving of our belief.

BEATRICE.

But is not the vast difference in belief an objection deserving of consideration?

MR. B.

We have before reduced all belief necessary to

salvation to the Holy Scriptures; and if from these a variety of creeds are deduced, this is the fault of the interpreters, not of the work itself, which is as plain in its declarations as a book well can be.

EDWARD.

If it had been purposely written in ambiguous language, a serious objection might thence have been drawn; but as it is, there appears no intention to involve the articles of faith in doubt.

BEATRICE.

But in what respects do you consider the doctrines of Christianity as useful to those whose education has been so far deficient, or whose employments are such, as to put a thorough knowledge of the subject out of their power?

MR. B.

Try all that you can effect by abstract reasoning with a poor man, prevented by illness from labouring for his family, and pining away day after day: all that is said in such a case may be very good; but it touches not the heart; it has no hold upon him, and is forgotten as soon as you have left him. But address that man in the language used in the twelfth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews: remind him, that all things are in subjection to God; that by the Gospel he is taught to address God as his Father; that in it he is assured of his mercy, and that present afflictions are designed

to prepare him so as to serve God better here, that he may be admitted into heaven hereafter; and you speak a language which he can understand, which he can feel, and apply to his own use.

EDWARD.

But all this depends upon the certainty that this doctrine is true.

MR. B.

And therefore it is happy for the poor, that their confidence is not weakened by doubts, which their situation in life would not in many cases enable them to clear up without assistance. The poor but pious Christian finds his Bible prove true so far as he consults it, and to him this is sufficient.

BEATRICE.

This illustration, however, only involves a doctrine which might perhaps be inferred from natural religion.

MR. B.

It could not, however, be so proved from thence as to convey to a man situated as we supposed that confidence which arises from simple faith in the word of God. If time, however, permitted, I am convinced it would not be difficult to shew the importance of all the leading doctrines of Christianity, in their influence upon the minds of persons of every class; and thence a strong argument would arise in favour of the religion which thus produced beneficial results.

EDWARD.

It is easy to see that the precepts and motives of the Gospel extend to all classes; and their simplicity is well adapted to further their general usefulness.

MR. B.

Without the guide furnished for action in the first, the stimulus afforded by the latter would be useless: without the excitation of motives, the precepts might be admired, but would never be practised. If, then, you consider what profound knowledge of the heart and the mind must be necessary to form a right conception of what precepts will be universally applicable, what motives will be universally operative, you may determine for yourselves the probability that such a book as the New Testament, so full of matter, giving general rules on all subjects connected with religion, could be produced without a divine revelation, under the circumstances in which we know it made its first appearance.

EDWARD.

These last arguments have had great weight with me; but I should wish to know how far they are affected by the objections brought against Christianity.

MR. B.

I have pursued the arguments in our late conversations, without stopping to consider these ob-

jections, for these reasons—that they have in no instance amounted to any thing like proof—many of them disappear when the whole system of Christianity is viewed—and all of them have been considered in detail by persons whose works are easily procured. With regard to some, however, I will make a few remarks. By far the most formidable objections to Christianity are those derived from the progress of science; for it appears next to impossible to prove it false by historical evidence, and it can hardly be expected that, after seventeen hundred years' investigation of its claims, it should be discovered to be contradictory or absurd in itself. But in regard to *physical truth*, there does seem, at first sight, some ground of apprehension. This, however, is greatly diminished, by the recollection that we must not assign to the sacred writers a character to which they made no pretensions. They did not write as philosophers. Had they done so, their works would have been unintelligible at the time they appeared, and for ages afterwards, till the slow progress of science elucidated their expressions.

BEATRICE.

We must, then, regard them only as using the popular language.

EDWARD.

Still, some facts they assert in so solemn a manner that more must be implied.

MR. B.

Of these by far the most important is the deluge, which Voltaire very ingeniously asserted to be *physically impossible*, much to the credit of his patient and accurate investigations on the subject. Unfortunately for his reputation, the fact is now established beyond controversy. In the *Reliquiæ Diluvianæ* of Mr. Buckland, you will find one of the most interesting books which modern research has produced ; and from it I shall now give you a few passages :—

“ Thus far I have produced a various, and, in my judgment, incontrovertible body of facts, to show that the whole earth has been subjected to a recent and universal inundation.”—*Rel. Dil.* p. 224.

“ All these facts, whether considered collectively or separately, present such a conformity of proofs, tending to establish the universality of a recent inundation of the earth, as no difficulties or objections that have hitherto arisen are in any way sufficient to over-rule.

“ In the full confidence that these difficulties will at length be removed, by the further extension of physical observations, we may for the present rest satisfied with the argument that numberless phenomena have been already ascertained, which, without the admission of an universal deluge, it seems not easy, nay, utterly impossible, to explain.”—*Rel. Dil.* p. 228.

In like manner, attempts to overthrow the authority of the Pentateuch, by obtaining an excessive antiquity to some nations, through the medium of astronomy, and by assigning the different variations of the human race to distinct

stocks, independent of each other, have wholly failed.

EDWARD.

But instances of failure such as these become afterwards corroborative evidence in favour of the truth of the Scriptures.

MR. B.

The minor objections in this branch are scarcely deserving of consideration, as they may be fully explained from the nature of the language made use of by the sacred writers.

The historical objections are now reduced within a very narrow compass. The most formidable, perhaps, is an ambiguous expression made use of in the second verse of the second chapter of St. Luke's Gospel; for the various methods of explaining or accounting for the words, you may refer to Campbell on the Gospels.

BEATRICE.

Does not the variation of the genealogies fall within this part of the subject?

MR. B.

It is generally admitted that St. Matthew gave the descent of Joseph, and St. Luke that of Mary, which may be accounted for by the consideration of the persons for whom each wrote, and the objects each had in view.

EDWARD.

Is not the silence of Josephus with regard to our Lord a serious objection?

MR. B.

It can be satisfactorily accounted for by the circumstances of the case. There is indeed a passage, which by some is regarded as genuine, but by most persons as spurious, which speaks very decidedly of our Lord; but we need not this aid.

EDWARD.

The slaughter of the infants in Bethlehem, I think, has been brought forward as unknown to history; and this, it is thought, hardly could have been omitted had it occurred.

MR. B.

Michaelis has shewn that the slaughter could only extend to so small a number, that the omission of it is not at all surprising, when we find other events which are known to have occurred omitted.

EDWARD.

Is it not also objected to the Scripture accounts of our Lord's miracles, that a greater number must have been converted had they been real?

MR. B.

This has been replied to by Mr. Weston, in his work on the Rejection of Miracles by the Hea-

then. You will also find some good observations on this and other objections to Christianity in the second volume of Paley's Evidences. The second volume of Jenkins's Reasonableness and Certainty of the Christian Religion is entirely devoted to the consideration of objections. Hardly any objection has been brought forward without a considerable number of answers appearing to it; among which it is not always easy to select the best; but you will find an account of several in Leland's Deistical Writers, besides very excellent observations by himself on the same subjects.

Though it may appear strange, considering who are the objectors, some have brought forward various passages of Scripture, particularly of the Pentateuch and historical books of the Old Testament, as contrary to sound morality. The former I have already in some measure considered, and with regard to all it may be observed, that there appears on the part of the objectors a fixed determination to misrepresent the subject.

EDWARD.

In some cases, perhaps, objections have arisen from bad translations.

MR. B.

But what are we to think of men who, in a matter of such great importance, will decide against a religion from a faulty translation?

EDWARD.

The want of agreement in some parts is also an objection, as well as chronological difficulties.

MR. B.

For the explanation of these, I must refer you to professed harmonists and writers on chronology, who will generally afford you satisfaction.

EDWARD.

Is not the mode of quotation adopted by the writers of the New Testament objected to by some?

MR. B.

Upon that subject you will find a very useful treatise by Dr. H. Owen; and for others, I refer you to Leland.

But with regard to all these objections, you must observe, that they by no means invalidate the proof we have considered, and in most cases throw very little doubt even on the single passages from which they are drawn. The gross ignorance of many objectors on the subject on which they profess to write is most shameful.

EDWARD.

Has there not been an argument raised against the Mosaic dispensation, as destitute of the doctrine of a future state?

MR. B.

The consideration of this question is the sub-

ject of Warburton's most celebrated work, "The Divine Legation of Moses," &c.

EDWARD.

In what manner is it treated ?

MR. B.

I will give you his own words as to the design of it.

POSTULATE.—"That a skilful lawgiver, establishing a religion and civil policy, acts with certain views, and for certain ends ; and not capriciously, without purpose or design.

PROPOSITION I. " That to inculcate the doctrine of a future state of rewards and punishments is necessary to the well-being of civil society.

II. " That all mankind, especially the most wise and learned nations of antiquity, have concurred in believing and teaching that this doctrine was of such use to civil society.

III. " That the doctrine of a future state of rewards and punishments is not to be found in, nor did make part of the Mosaic dispensation.

" That, therefore, the law of Moses is of divine origin.

For, I. " Whatsoever religion and society have no future state for their support, must be supported by an extraordinary providence.

" The Jewish religion and society had no future state for their support.

" Therefore the Jewish religion and society were supported by an extraordinary providence.

II. " The ancient lawgivers universally believed that such a religion could be supported only by an extraordinary providence.

" Moses, an ancient lawgiver, versed in all the wisdom of Egypt, purposely instituted such a religion.

“Therefore, Moses believed his religion was supported by an extraordinary providence.”—*WARBURTON'S Works*, vol. i. p. 50—57.

But it is only by actual perusal that a correct idea can be formed of this very extraordinary work.

EDWARD.

Do you regard it as conclusive ?

MR. B.

That the divine legation of Moses was proved by the religion and society of the Jews being supported by an extraordinary providence, I have no doubt, but not for the reason here assigned. The hypothesis itself appears to me false, and I regard the whole only as a most splendid instance of the union of genius and learning to very little purpose. It has been excessively admired, and vehemently attacked. The controversies to which it gave birth lasted a long time, but effected very little for the interests of religion. A very short time ago the subject has been revived by Mr. Lancaster, in his work on the Harmony of the Law and the Gospel, which you will read with pleasure as well as advantage.

BEATRICE.

His arguments are drawn up very systematically.

MR. B.

At first : but you soon lose sight of them in the

mass of learning which he brings forward, and in the continual development of new trains of thought: it is, after all, a most astonishing performance.

One of the most systematic writers on the evidences is Huet, Bishop of Avranches, who, in his *Demonstratio Evangelica*, has drawn them out in a regular series of definitions, postulates, axioms, and propositions. It is also a work of great learning, but of a very different character to the *Divine Legation of Moses*. The evidences have also been subjected to the mathematical doctrine of chances by Craig; but the book is now forgotten.

EDWARD.

Have, then, any other remarkable defences of Christianity appeared, as founded upon omissions similar to that of a future state under the Mosaic dispensation?

MR. B.

Dr. Priestley, I believe, was the first who thought of defending Christianity by denying the immateriality of the soul.

BEATRICE.

But can this possibly be consistent with the language of Scripture?

MR. B.

I think not, and fully agree with the sentiments of Bishop Horsley.

“Though I admit the possibility of an inspired teacher’s error of opinion in subjects which he is not sent to teach (because inspiration is not omniscience, and some things there must be which it will leave untaught); though I stand in this point for my own and every man’s liberty, and protest against any obligation on the believer’s conscience, to assent to a philosophical opinion, incidentally expressed by Moses, by David, or by St. Paul, upon the authority of their infallibility in divine knowledge; though I think it highly for the honour and the interest of religion, that this liberty of philosophising (except upon religious subjects) should be openly asserted, and most pertinaciously maintained; yet I confess it appears to me no very probable supposition (and it is, as I conceive, a mere supposition, not yet confirmed by any one clear instance), that an inspired writer should be permitted in a religious discourse to affirm a false proposition in *any* subject, or in *any* history to misinterpret a fact; so that I would not easily, nor indeed without the conviction of the most cogent proof, embrace any notion in philosophy, or attend to any historical relation, which should be evidently and in itself repugnant to an explicit assertion of any of the sacred writers.”—*HORSLEY’S Sermons*, vol. iii. p. 179.

You will find the whole sermon very well worth a careful perusal; and it is upon the nature of the connexion between soul and body.

EDWARD.

Besides these, are there any other modes of proof which have been made use of which appear inconclusive?

MR. B.

The proof used by some Romanists appears deserving of censure, as well as one held by some

denominations of protestants. The former is that the books of the sacred Scriptures are canonical because the church constitutes them so, and the church has power so to do because the books are canonical.

BEATRICE.

In this the truth of each part depends upon the other, so that it is wholly inconclusive.

MR. B.

The second is an inward sensation, regarded as an attestation from God in favour of the sacred writings.

BEATRICE.

If we could be certain that a sensation of this kind were really from him, it would be no proof to another.

MR. B.

Besides these, there may be other proofs alleged in favour of Christianity, as weak as the objections made against it; but from neither can we conclude that Christianity is a divine revelation or not. The truth of Christianity rests on facts and reasonings, which no objections, yet adduced, are of sufficient force to overthrow. We need, therefore, no additional evidence; for there is already much more than what would be deemed sufficient to determine the truth in all ordinary cases; and inasmuch as the greatest consequences depend upon our conduct here, it

requires no great skill in logic to shew that the safest course is the best.

BEATRICE.

I could not reject, if I wished ; but what are we to think of those who do ?

MR. B.

Leave them to Him who alone can determine how far guilt attaches to their conduct. We are, in all respects, unable to decide respecting them. Our only care must be, that we perish not through their folly, that we contribute not to their ruin. I would not judge harshly of any individual ; but I have the fullest conviction on my mind, that infidelity does not arise from any reasonable cause.

THE END.



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